

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND SHET

Chapter 01: Pre_FACE

Chapter 02: What is a Heart String Marionette?

Chapter 03: The mythology of Heart String Marionette

Chapter 04: CharacterS

Chapter 05: The Stage is set

Chapter 06: Making of Heart String Marionette

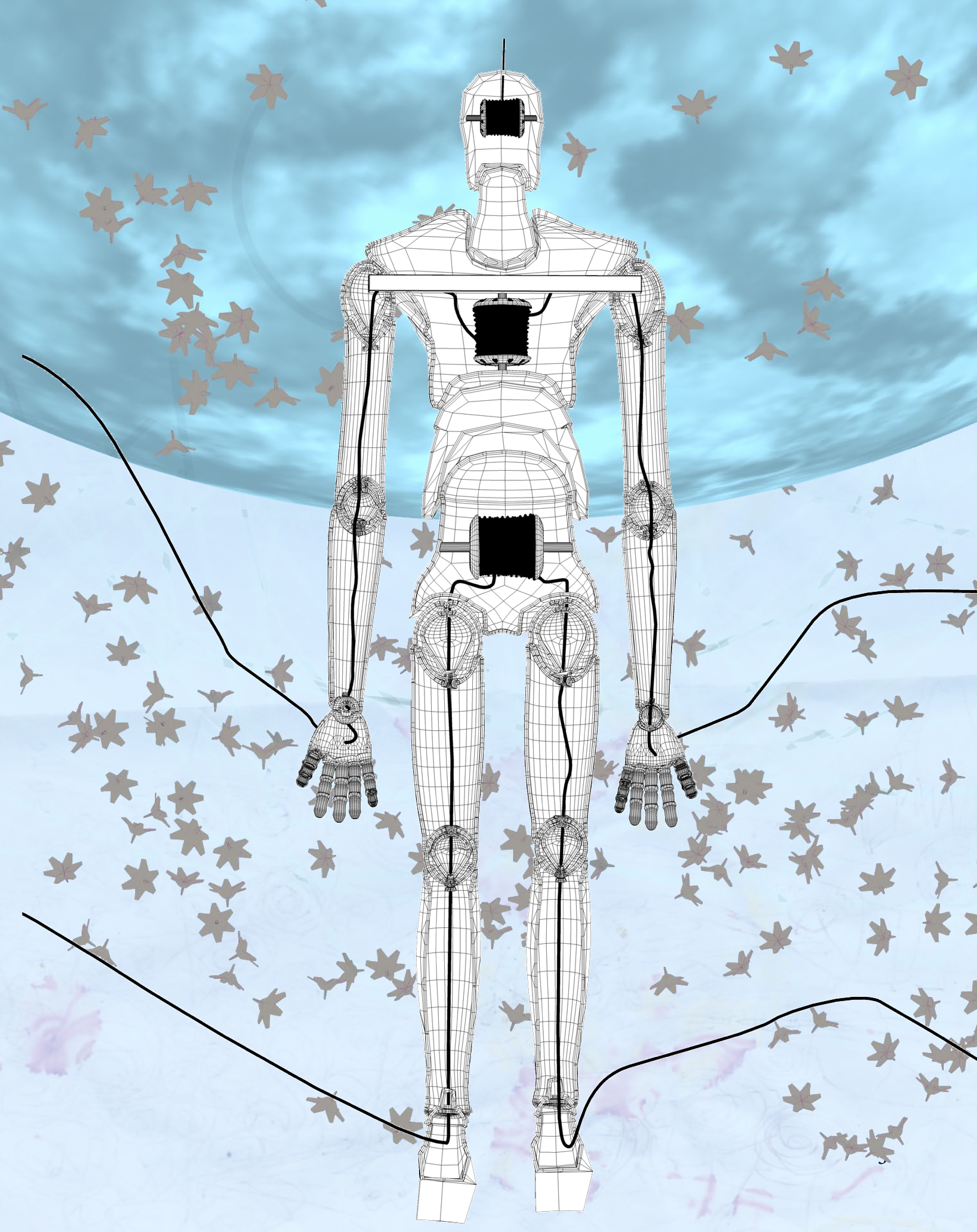
Chapter 07: Workflow

Chapter 08: StraNOHme

Chapter 09: M.arionette Theory

Chapter 10: The Uberectors guild

Chapter 11: Heart Strange Marionette Research Trips





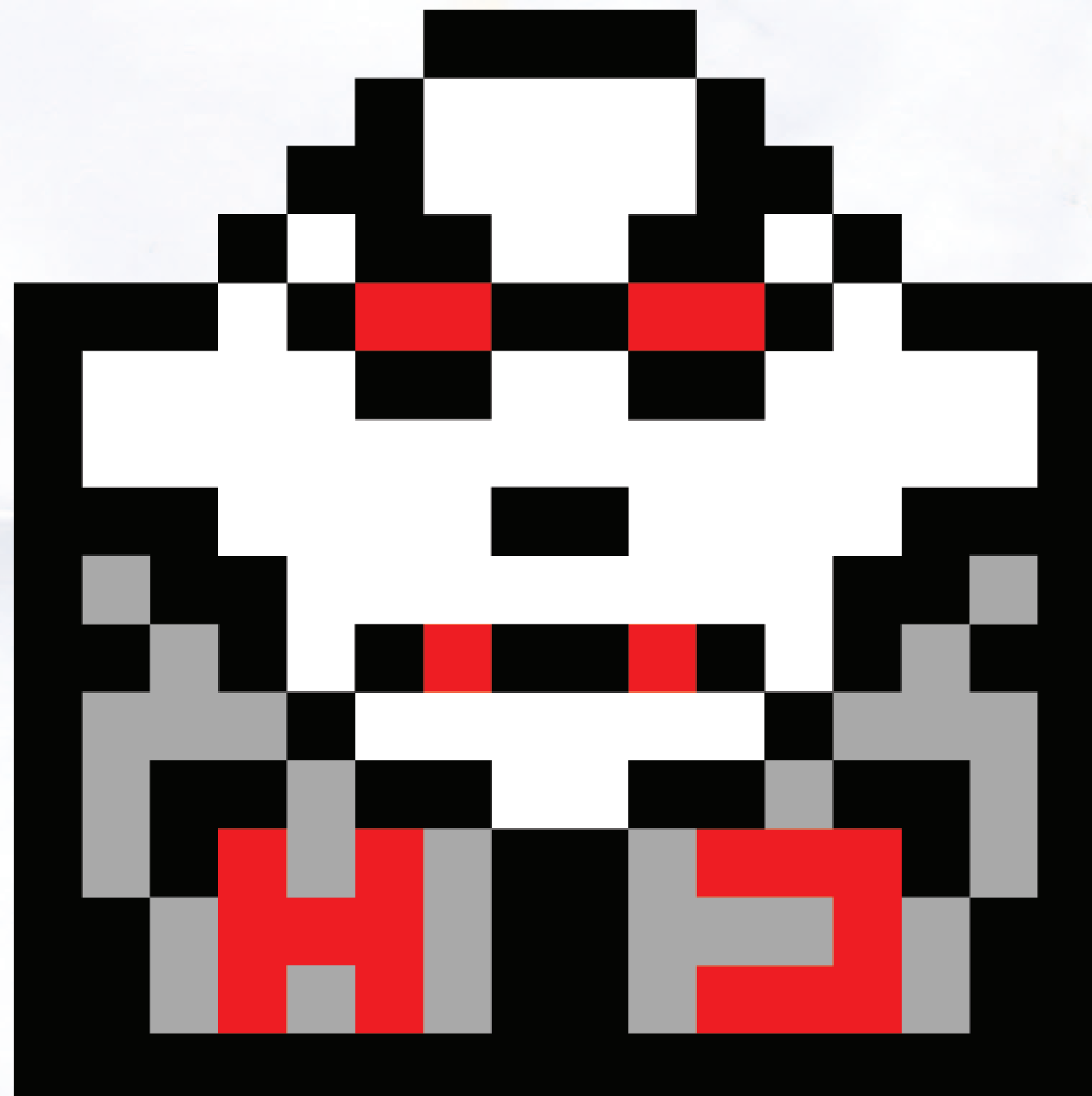


Siouxsie Silen and Samhaine Tsuke

CHAPTER 01

PRE_FACE





Hello and welcome to my first book. WELCOME?! In this book you will see how the art of the film has developed, as well as the story and the philosophy behind it. I try to share as much of my process both in front of the camera and behind it.

I had to break this book up into two books to keep this one affordable. This is A_BOOK which is all about HEART STRING MARIONETTE. The second book is B_BOOK which is MORE about the philosophy behind the film as well as art and life in general. So if you want to read more about how I became “M dot Strange” and the experiences and philosophies that led me to where I am today today then B_BOOK is for you.

BUT this is A_BOOK! This is all about HEART STRING MARIONETTE with my extra special tips about being an UBERECTOR. I hope it's not too geeky for the people that just want to learn about HSM. I also hope it is geeky ENOUGH for the people who hate what I do and just want to learn more about making their own animated feature films. Whatever the case I hope you enjoy A_BOOK!

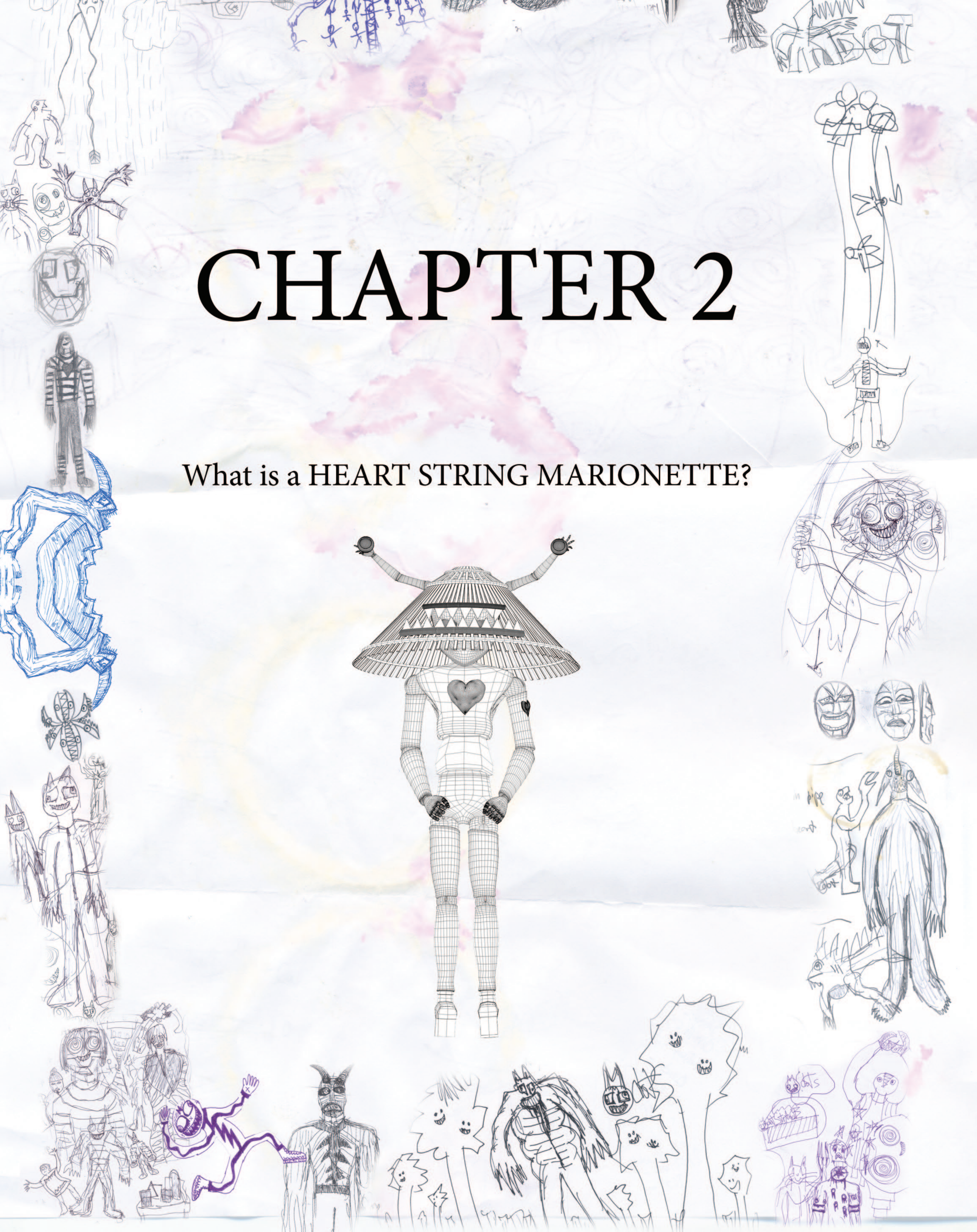
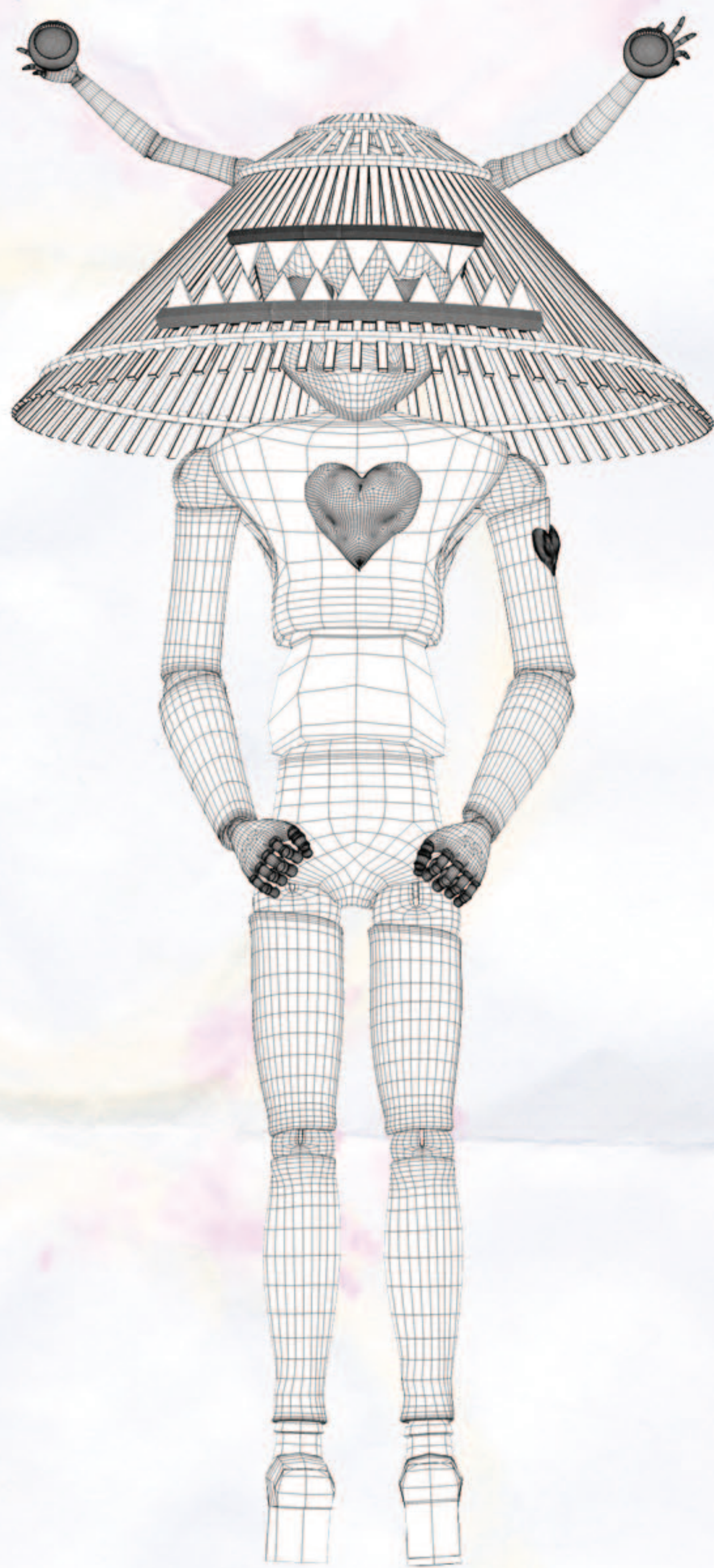
Thanks so much for your support and if you ever have any questions or feedback about the book or any of the things discussed in it please feel free to drop by my blog:

<http://mysteriousdollfilm.blogspot.com>

OR email me directly at helpmdot@gmail.com

CHAPTER 2

What is a HEART STRING MARIONETTE?



Before I go on in discussing the film and the techniques and philosophies behind it, I should first explain what a HEART STRING MARIONETTE is.

All my life I've always done what felt right. It didn't matter if it was against the rules or "not what you're supposed to do". I always just did what felt right. When faced with certain situations I always felt a little twinge inside my chest and a pull, a definite pull, a sensation as if something was pulling me away from the situation. Now my HEAD was trying to pull me in the opposite direction telling me what the "right" thing to do was and my GUTS agreed out of fear of what might happen if we didn't do what was "right". That "right" was according to the status quo and that way is not the way M dot Strange did eventually go.

So one of the things early on in life that I got pulled away from was SCHOOL. I don't remember it, but my mom told me that I spent the whole first week of Kindergarten underneath the table because I was scared to come out. For some reason school never felt right to me. Now you might say that tons of kids don't want to go to school, but they still do it. Yes, that is true, but maybe they SHOULDN'T have? By the third grade I HATED school, it felt wrong. I felt like there was nothing to learn there, it was all blah blah blah and the kids were mean little robots giving you indian burns or trying to scratch your face off in the bathroom during fabricated "bloody mary" attack. I was in the gifted program and they had me sit in with a class two grades higher because they were like "Sorry Michael we have nothing else to teach you here in the 3rd grade." but 5th grade didn't challenge me either, so they thought it would be good for me to help the 5th graders, but they just wanted me to give them the answers.

So at this point school didn't really feel right and there was nothing for me to learn, so I decided to stop going. Every day became this epic battle between me and my mom "I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL!" vs "BUT YOU HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL!" She worked full time, so she could only fight for a few hours, so I would eventually win and go on with my NO SCHOOL day. This isn't about my life as a truant, in which I had new epic battles with my truant officer, in which I would

escape the literal grasps of school district police officers by greasing up my arms with vaseline and running away. I'll save those stories for another book at another time.

School didn't feel right so I didn't go. When I was faced with being forced to attend those classes everyday, it felt like something inside me was going to break, something was going to snap, my strings were going to snap! Not the strings attached to my head, not the strings attached to my guts, but the strings attached to my HEART.

We're all born as marionettes... driven by the hands above...

Connected at the heart from the start we're tugged through life.. through thick and thin...

Dragged through the mud and into the moonlight forever living with a strange sparkle in our eye and an odd spring in our step because of this divine fragile connection...

Which once severed can never be repaired....

We're all bound by the strings of fate whether we can see them or not....

Follow the hand, and all will be as it should... for you as a marionette...

Pull away too hard for too long and you'll be lost... the strings snap...

Your joints stiffen and your mind clouds... a mere puppet controlled from below...

Pain and sadness if all you'll ever know...lost...wandering... alone...

I've always followed my heart. It has led me into some pretty low situations. Living in a kitchen nook without any friends in a new town, crying in a Tokyo train station bathroom stall contemplating jumping in front of a train, constantly having little money or material possessions. But through it all I never lost my spark. Since I stayed connected to the hands above at the heart, I was able to call upon a force bigger and stronger than myself to overcome any situation and I have NEVER ever truly felt ALONE.

That connection is what has allowed me to keep moving on and doing my best no matter what my own head or even anyone else says. In the end we have to live our life on our own and I believe we each have our own UNIQUE special purpose. IF we stay connected to those strings of fate they will lead us to our special place and all will be well for us. Following the path does not guarantee wealth or f rings or acting as your higher power is a LIAR. They are trying to grab hold of your strings and lead you where they want you to go for whatever reason. Only YOU know who/what that thing is.

I M a Marionette to my art, that's my higher power. It leads me and keeps me going and it gives back to me. Its a constant source of energy, inspiration and life. True art is much like a natural force and true artists are a lot like forces of nature. In my own experience I've seen a connection between true art and nature. Two things that are very important to me, two things I'm passionate about, two things that pull my strings and drive me in various directions. A third thing is Magick. Magick is the manipulation of the will. Will is required for art. Art obeys the laws of nature and revels in its imperfect perfection.

A HEART STRING MARIONETTE is exactly that. A Marionette guided through life following his/her heart. Most people I've found follow theY head or their guts. They follow theY head if they want to "GET RICH QUICK" etc. and they follow their guts if they want to "FIGHT FUCK EAT REPRODUCE". It's very similar to the meridian system paradigm: "guts" would be the "root" chakra, "head" would probably be the "throat" chakra and "heart" would be the "heart" chakra. But what about the "crown" chakra M dot?! Hey, hey this is my airy fairy philosophy so let me decide!

So you know you're a HEART STRING MARIONETTE if you've ignored what everyone and everything else has told you to do, even your own head! Yet, somehow, without having what western society has agreed upon as requirements for happiness, you are quite happy. Your head might tell you that you've done it all wrong but in your heart it feels RIGHT.

So I've always lived as this Heart String Marionette. I believe all who follow their passions, who indulge and love the arts with their all, we are all heart string marionettes. So I made this film because the title I came up with is something that meant a lot to me and that's how I work: it all starts with a title.

So I came up with the title and crafted a story around what it meant to me and I didn't really know what it meant to me at first. I discovered it on the journey of creating this film.

I remember a friend telling me this about WE ARE THE STRANGE: "You know it's kind of hard to understand your film... it's kind of hard to explain it." and I said "Well look at it like this... is it easy to explain your own emotions? Are they easy to understand?" Film is my ART, and since it is my ART I'm going to approach it as a living thing which contains a certain amount of mystical power. There is something mysterious and unexplained in true art and that is what I'm after. If I were to remove the mystical power so that it was easily explainable in a simple cause and effect way then it wouldn't be my ART, it would be my CRAFT and if I were into the craft business I'm sure there's over 9000 other things I could craft that would be a lot more profitable than making animated feature films alone.

I do so because that's where I'm being pulled, and I follow because I know and I trust that in the end my performance will be as it should. We've all been written very interesting parts in this grand performance called life. That is if you choose to follow your heart and find the script that lies inside.

Now what happens if you don't follow your heart and the strings break?

With Severed strings... regret sings...

Those lost... try to re-attach at any cost...

Lashing out at those floating above...

Holding them back... weighing them down...

Just to get one more ride of life...

If you pull away too hard for too long your strings snap and you will no longer be connected to that divine source of energy, drive and direction. You will no longer be driven by things ABOVE as a MARIONETTE. Instead you will be driven by things BELOW as a PUPPET. A Marionette is driven by its higher self, a Puppet by its lower self.

Once someone has lost their connection they stumble about dragging theY strings along the ground. Since they no longer have their connection to that higher source of infinite energy and power, they begin the slow decline towards dying inside. Instead of accepting their fate they take their severed strings and, out of desperation, they seek to latch onto and drag down those who are still connected. They become parasites that feed off of the living, the connected. These Puppets, since they are controlled from below, only know how to do one thing: drag others down.

They will try to hold you back, drag you down, prevent you from soaring above and beyond their grasp. If these Puppets have no Marionettes to feed off of they will die, so they do/say whatever they can to maintain their connections.

I once attended a lecture by this spiritual healer guy back when I was a teenager. His theory was that when we are involved with another person sexually, for example, that we form a connection with them from, lets say, our root chakra. He referred to these energy sapping connections as shunts. His theory was that when we have these connections we can exchange energy through this connection... and when things go the wrong way it is a one way parasitic relationship, constantly sapping our energy. Maybe thats where legends of Succubi and Incubi came from? So I say be careful with who/how many people your lower self connects with lest you become a Puppet. With so many connections dragging you down your strings are sure to snap.

Do you know people who always seem to want something from you? That just won't leave you be? People who are always trying to drag you into things you don't want to get into? These are probably Puppets trying to drag you down so your strings will snap and you will feel just as disconnected and helpless as they feel. Misery does love company.

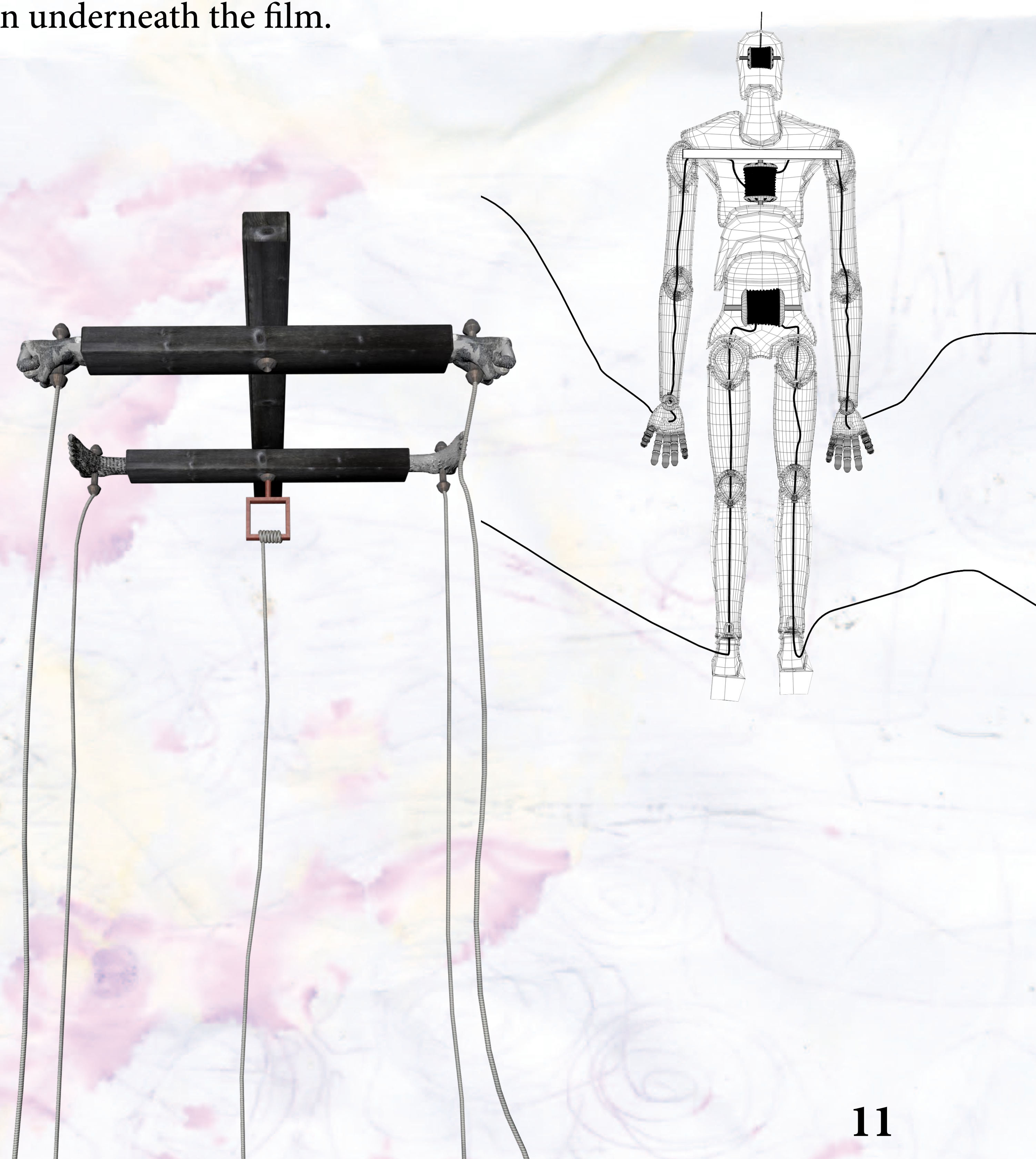
These puppets will try to attach their severed strings to you and drag you down which is why you need a SWORD. A sword to sever their connections and float on up into the clouds. This sword comes from your heart: it's your passion. As long as you stay connected to

your higher power, whatever that may be, you will have unlimited power of passion. This PASSION will be the SWORD that you use to fight back against the lower self serving Puppets.

It's a challenge to not die inside and keep your passion alive in this world, but know that it will be your ultimate weapon if you FIGHT to keep it alive. You will always have this sword that never dulls or loses its luster to defend yourself with. You may fight to the death while wielding this sword, but you have already decided that you'd rather die outside than inside. The key is to fight to stay alive in all ways. With the sword of passion in your hands you will always have a stronger will and a stronger resolve than the Puppets around you, so you will outlast them. For the Marionette fights not only for their own self, but for all Marionettes. For all people with this passion alive in their hearts, whatever their calling might be.

I'm not attempting to present this as fact or even as the "right" way, these are merely my opinions that I have presented as food for thought when discussing HEART STRING MARIONETTE.

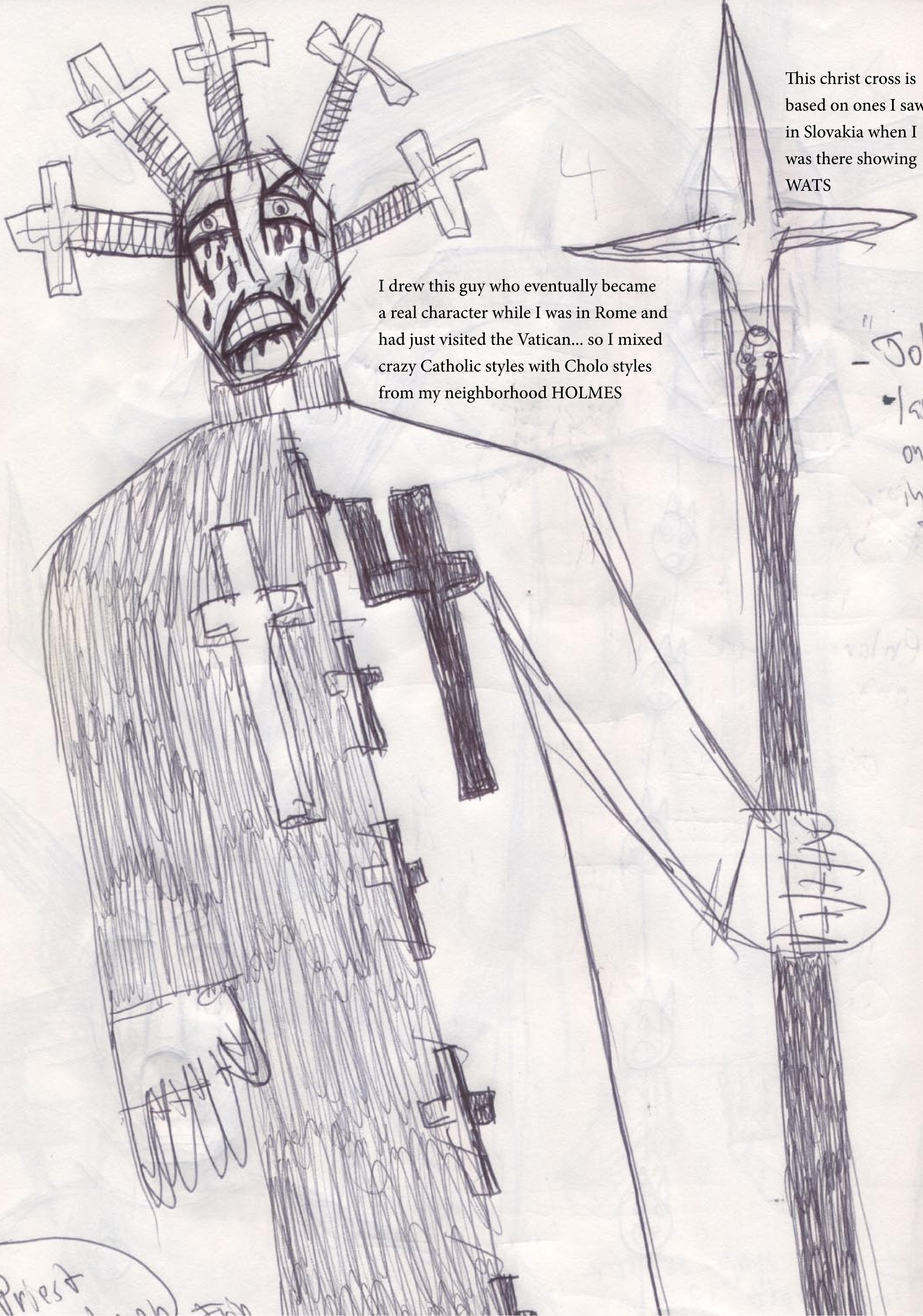
So I hope you have an understanding of the philosophy behind HSM. While there is a logical/cause & effect "story" driving HSM I wanted to give you a little glimpse of the things going on underneath the film.







Just a bunch of puppets



This christ cross is
based on ones I saw
in Slovakia when I
was there showing
WATS

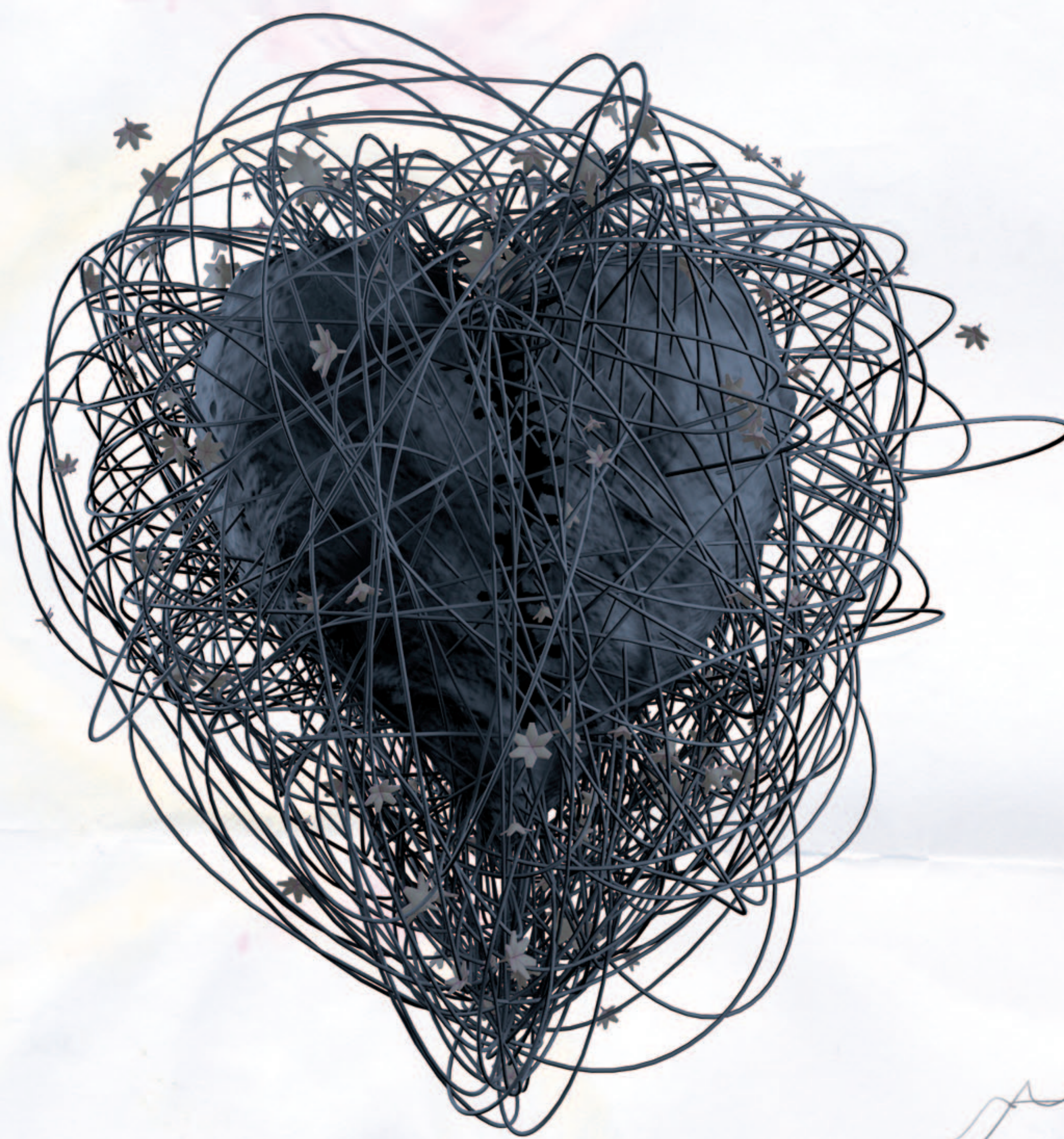
I drew this guy who eventually became
a real character while I was in Rome and
had just visited the Vatican... so I mixed
crazy Catholic styles with Cholo styles
from my neighborhood HOLMES

"John" as
- 1st name
on badge
is John
3/16

Priest

CHAPTER 3

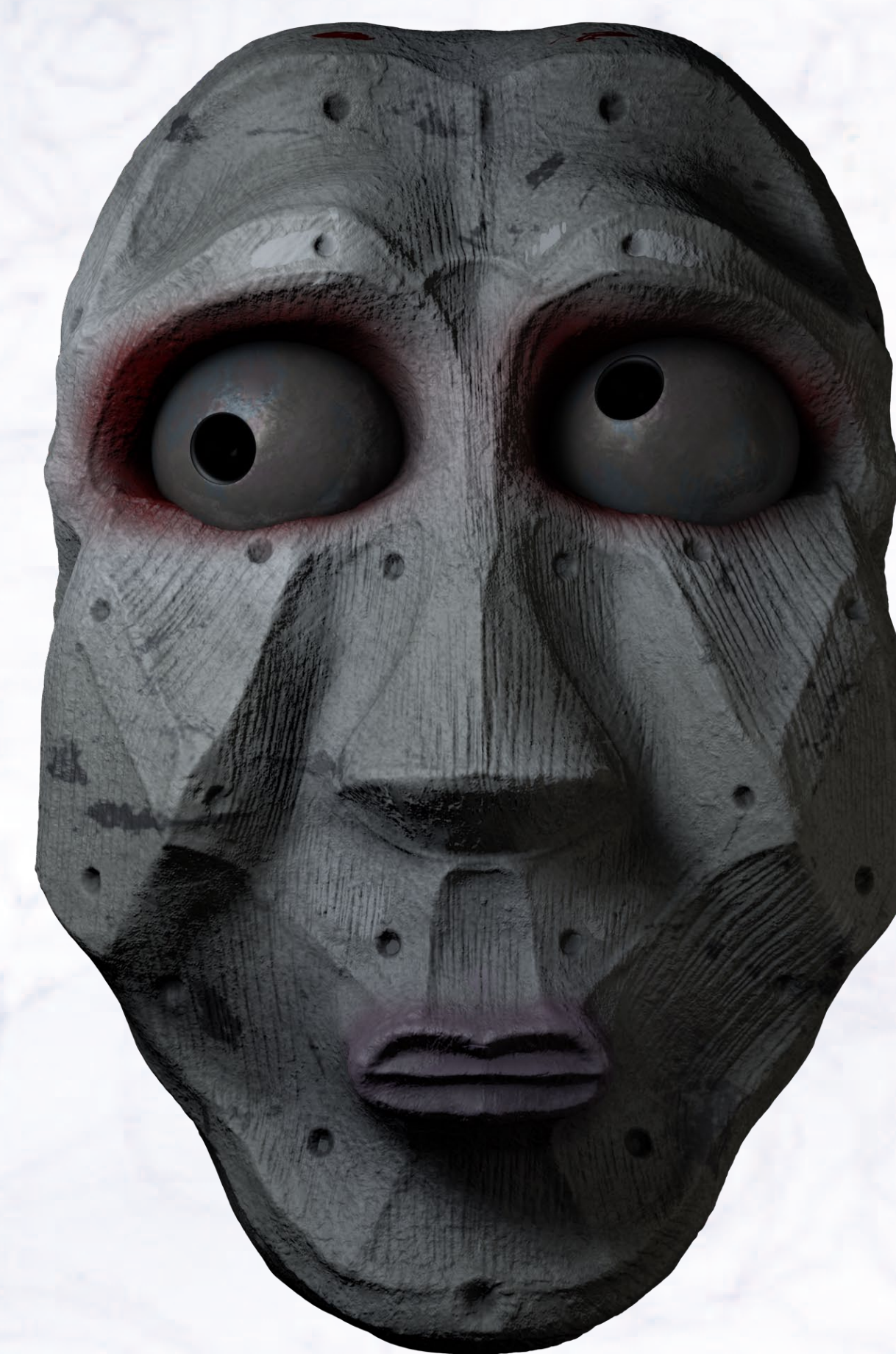
The Mythology of Heart String Marionette



The MASKS: Every person in the world of HSM wears a Mask. Why do they wear these Masks? It's commonly believed that if you show your true face that The Devil will steal your soul turning you into a Mannequin, so people believe that this is where the Mannequins littered throughout the land have come from. So you must never take off your Mask! Every person does have a unique face beneath their Mask, but as to not call any attention to themselves they choose to wear one of several pre-made Masks. They must choose to fit in one of the archetypal groups because if you make a new Mask or call too much attention to yourself The Devil is sure to come calling! There is a legend of a particular Mask that the Devil himself fears, it is known as the MASK OF DESPAIR. The legend stems from a famous play known as "THE SILENT FORM". In the play the Mask of Despair is worn by "SAMHAINE TSUKE". Although the Mask of Despair is a fictional object from a work of fiction, its potential existence makes for scary stories to tell children. It's said that the Mask is so evil that it robs the wearer of their real face!

The TIME BEFORE MASKS: There was a time in the distant past wherein people walked around showing their true faces. Every person was unique, as their true faces are unique. Once people began to disappear and show up as mannequins, rumors started to circulate that they had been victimized by the devil. These rumors led to fears that showing your true face made you vulnerable to the powers of the devil so people began to wear masks to hide their true faces. Once the wearing of one of the few archetypal masks began to be common practice people began to lose their individuality. People began to conform to the masks they were wearing, and in time their unique faces became distant memories.

The MANNEQUINS: These frozen people wrapped in rhetoric are found all over the land. Men and women, young and old. They were all once normal living Puppet people but would then disappear under mysterious circumstances, later to be found in Mannequin form. Once a Mannequin, it seems there is no way to return them to their former state. It seems as if now there are more Mannequins in the land than there are living people. Most people believe that Mannequins are made when a person fails to wear a Mask and The Devil shows up, looks into their eyes and steals their soul. This has caused a great fear throughout the land, with every person wearing a Mask. Even though all the people constantly wear Masks, they continue to disappear and return as Mannequins. When examined, the text wrapped around most all Mannequins appears to be religious and political rhetoric. Mannequins also seem to always be found in simi-



lar poses. People say that when The Devil steals your soul, he also steals your happy memories and only leaves you with feelings of despair.

THE SILENT FORM: The Silent Form is a famous play in the world of HSM. The play was written by an unknown author at an unknown date. The play's protagonist SAMHAINE TSUKE is the MARIONETTE PRINCE, the last of his kind. Demon slayer and eccentric showman, Samhaine wanders the world looking for his FACE, since he claims to not have one. On his travels he slays the Monsters that stand in his way. Samhaine was born from a BLACK MASS making his father The Devil himself! There is much argument as to whether The Silent Form is based on a true story or pure fiction. There is a growing number of people who believe that it is a true story, but they are looked upon as extremist wackos by the masses. The Silent Form is only known in its literary form as it is banned from being performed under Lord Wor's rule. One of the biggest known fans of The Silent Form is an archer from Lord Wor's army named TATSUYA. One of the most controversial things about The Silent Form is the debate about the existence of MARIONETTES.

MARIONETTE: A Marionette is a mythical being said to be controlled and guided from above by invisible strings connected to invisible hands. In fantasy literature of old, the common belief was that the world was made up of nothing but Marionettes at one point in time. Then the Marionettes fell, one by one, after pulling away from their controllers for too long, making them Puppets and ancestors of the current populace. Much of a Mari-

onette's power comes from the faith it puts in its invisible strings. Having never seen the strings, they claim to feel them being tugged occasionally. Since only a Marionette can feel its own strings, the existence of these strings is debated. Once fallen, it is possible for a Puppet to transform back into a Marionette. However since much faith is required, the faith in invisible strings that connect everything on the stage, Puppets usually give up before they are able to retain their supposed higher past form. In the play The Silent Form one last Marionette exists. His name is Samhaine Tsuke and it is said that he is the Marionette Prince.

PUPPETS: As opposed to the mythical Marionette that is said to be controlled from above, the common Puppet is controlled from below. Whilst Marionettes are said to be powered and motivated by a mystical, magickal force that tugs at their Heart Strings from above, Puppets are controlled from below, pulled down so they don't fly too high. They are motivated by much lower things, or base desires. Puppets are controlled by their lower selves as they seek security, wealth and sexual satisfaction as theY primary motivating factors. Puppets abhor the thought of the Marionette, a being that can be motivated by higher ideals. It is believed by some that as soon as people became Puppets, said Puppets were so enraged at seeing beings flying over them, that they worked together to drag the Marionettes down and fought to force them to become one of their own. If Marionettes are flying amongst the clouds, then Puppets are wallowing in the muck. Since all people have become Puppets the term "Puppet" is no longer used as its become ubiquitous with existence.

THE STAGE: In the world of Marionettes the STAGE is the WORLD. That is to say Marionettes view existence as a grand performance, in which one is merely an actor playing the part a Higher Power has written for them. So they trust this Higher Power, follow their Heart Strings and have faith that they will be a part of a great show. Marionettes know what goes into a good drama, they know it must have highs and lows, as that is important in portraying a realistic character. Marionettes believe that one can play many roles in a single existence. They also believe that improvisation

is encouraging and very rewarding. They know that as long as they are connected they can never stray too far from where the strings of fate guide them. The Stage can morph and change into different sets, but one always needs to put on their best performance, no matter the conditions of the Stage, as an audience is always watching.

THE AUDIENCE: The Audience see's the world through the eyes of fate, they sit in the jury of history. Their eternal, unflinching gaze has seen many performances throughout the ages, so they are not impressed by smoke and mirrors. They see through the "hack" performances, as they have seen every show that has ever been performed. An actor must really do something deeply moving, original and authentic to move this Audience. They sit before the stage and will wait until the end of time for a worthy performance.

DEATH: Death is the fear of LIFE. Dying is easy and living is very difficult, so most choose a slow death rather than taking the risk of actually living. It is said that Marionettes embraced death and used it to guide the way they lived. The thought of death terrifies the Puppet, as all they know is their lower desires which are bound to the earth. The Marionette fears not Death, as its very existence is based upon the connection they maintain with their higher power.

LIFE: Life is living without fear of DEATH. It is said that only Marionettes truly experience life as all that a Puppet knows is varying speeds of death. Supposedly when we took our place on the Stage, we did so to LIVE and not to DIE.

HIGHER POWER: It is said that each Marionette has it's own Higher Power and that each Higher Power is different. The only universal truth is that the Higher Power is the connection in which the Marionette interfaces with the The Stage and everything else in it. Puppets use the notion of a "Higher Power" to



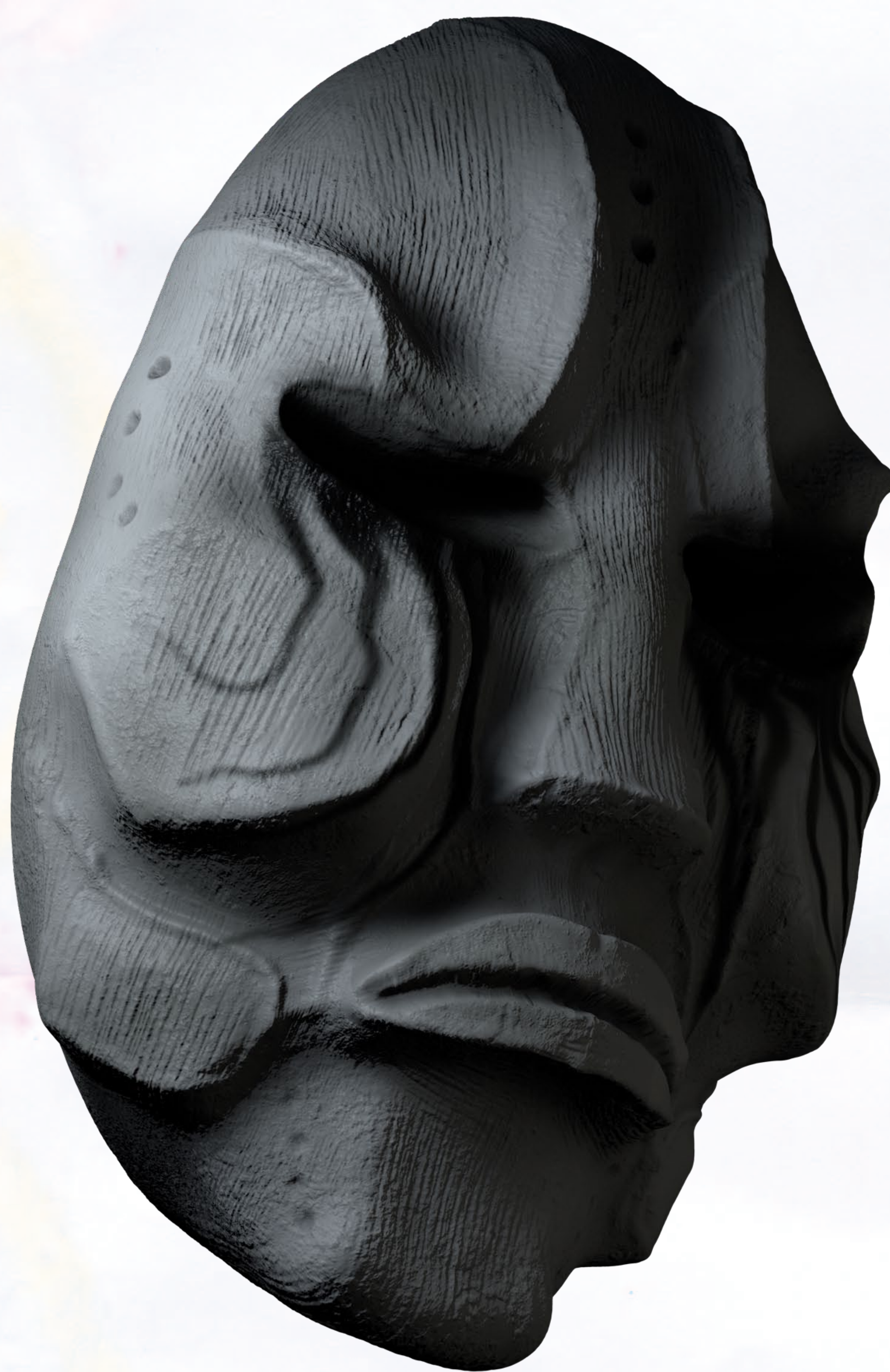
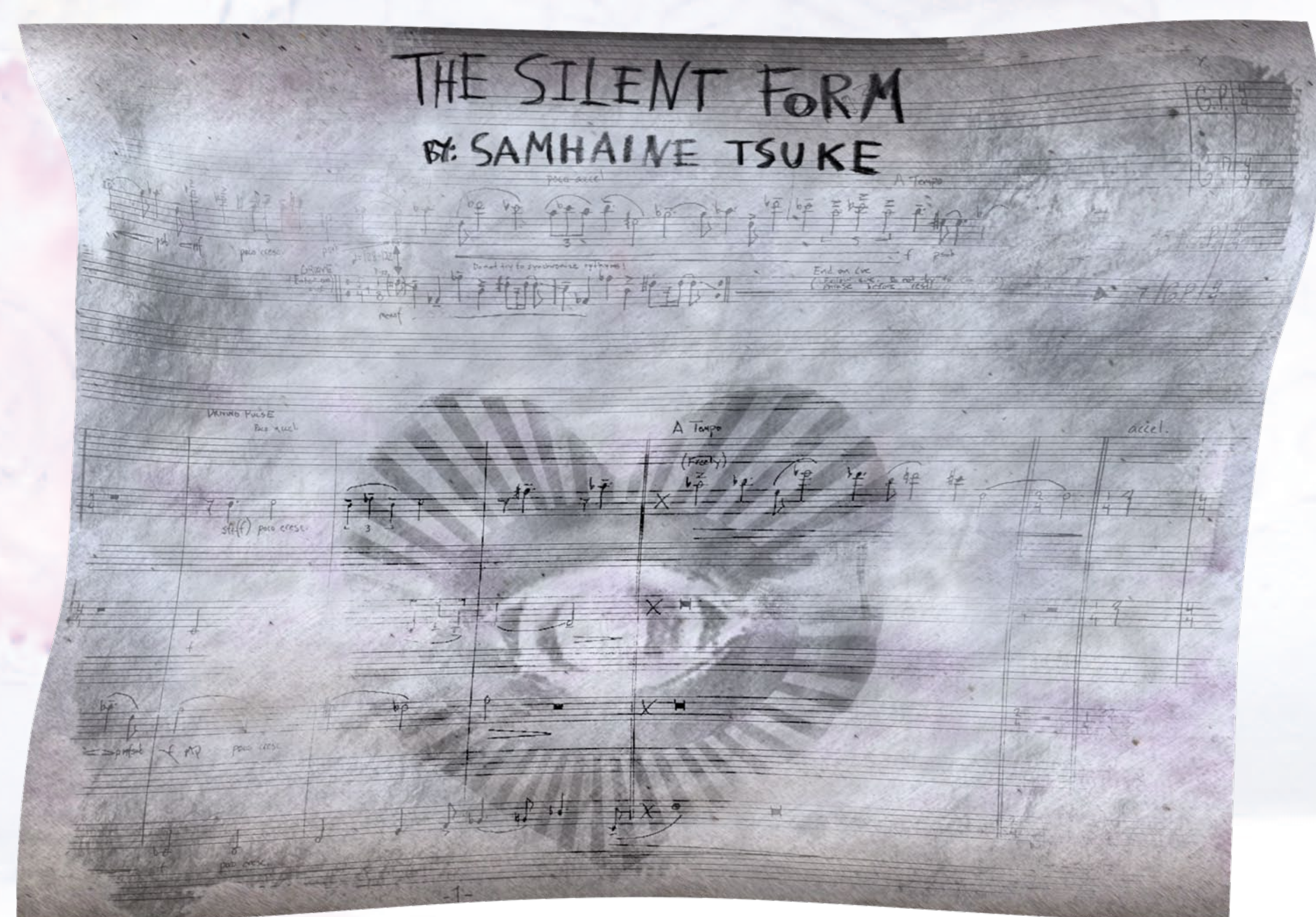
enslave, manipulate and control other Puppets, as well as to drag down and destroy Marionettes in the name of their supposed one true omnipotent Higher Power. Higher Powers exist in the Nether World and communicate with Marionettes and other connected living things through invisible strings.

MONSTERS: Monsters are creatures that exist to feed on and consume the flesh of the living, whether that be Puppet or Marionette. A Monster is the lower self in elemental form. It has no conscience or free will and it is completely subservient to its base hungers. Monsters are not born, they are made. They are made through a process of physical, chemical and electromagnetic manipulation. It's rumored that LORD WOR created all of the Monsters that roam the land. Monsters are incredibly fearsome and powerful. Puppets usually do not have the resolve or faith that a Higher Power is backing them up when facing a Monster. Monsters usually block passageways or protect treasures. They dwell in forests and rivers, both above the ground and below.

MASK OF DESPAIR: The name of the Mask that Samhaine Tsuke wears in the play "THE SILENT FORM". The actual look of the Mask is highly debated. Something that it is so fearsome and terrible that a mere glance at it would scare a person to death and that even Monsters and Demons fear the mask! Others believe that the Mask is so full of sorrow that it will cause any who gaze at it to weep uncontrollably. Still others believe that the most terrifying thing about the "Mask" is that there is no Mask at all and the wearer simply exposes his true face, believing it to be a Mask?! One is said to find this Mask laying somewhere near his/her feet when one is at the lowest depths of despair. The Mask is said to contain an unfathomable darkness that devours all despair and replaces it with a feeling of numbness. The slow death.

THE DEVIL: The Devil or "that twisted, old Bastard" is said to reincarnate every generation. As one dies, he is replaced by his son who follows the same path. With this eternal succession The Devil never relinquishes his power, he merely transfers it to his son who continues this doomed legacy. It could be said that The Devil is the King of Puppets. During a Puppet's life he/she lives in the shadow of The Devil. Each Puppet a small reflection of The Devil, his habits and his values. The Devil yearns for eternal youth, power over the people and control of the world. He feeds on the lifeblood of the people and is supported by their wealth. He, in turn, promises them eternal youth, power and control. However this is

The Devil's trick, as he keeps these things for himself and merely drains his followers of their life and discards the empty husks. It is said that a certain man built a machine wherein he sucks the lifeblood of the people and shares it with The Devil who, in turn, grants him supernatural power. But one would have to go to hell to see for oneself?!









The AUDIENCE awaits



The image is a complex collage centered around a 3D wireframe model of a character. The character is a humanoid figure with a rounded head, a long neck, and a body composed of a grid of lines. It is holding a long, thin staff or spear in its right hand and a curved, segmented object in its left hand. The character is positioned in the center of the image, with its legs spread apart and arms extended.

Surrounding the central figure are numerous hand-drawn sketches and illustrations. At the top, there are several small, stylized figures and objects, including what looks like a key, a small house, and some abstract shapes. To the left, there is a vertical strip of sketches, including a cat-like face, a person in a striped shirt, and a large, blue, abstract shape. To the right, there are more sketches, including a person in a long coat, a person in a hat, and a person in a mask. At the bottom, there are more sketches, including a person in a mask, a person in a hat, and a person in a mask. The background is a light, textured surface with some faint, abstract shapes.

CHAPTER 4

CharacterRs

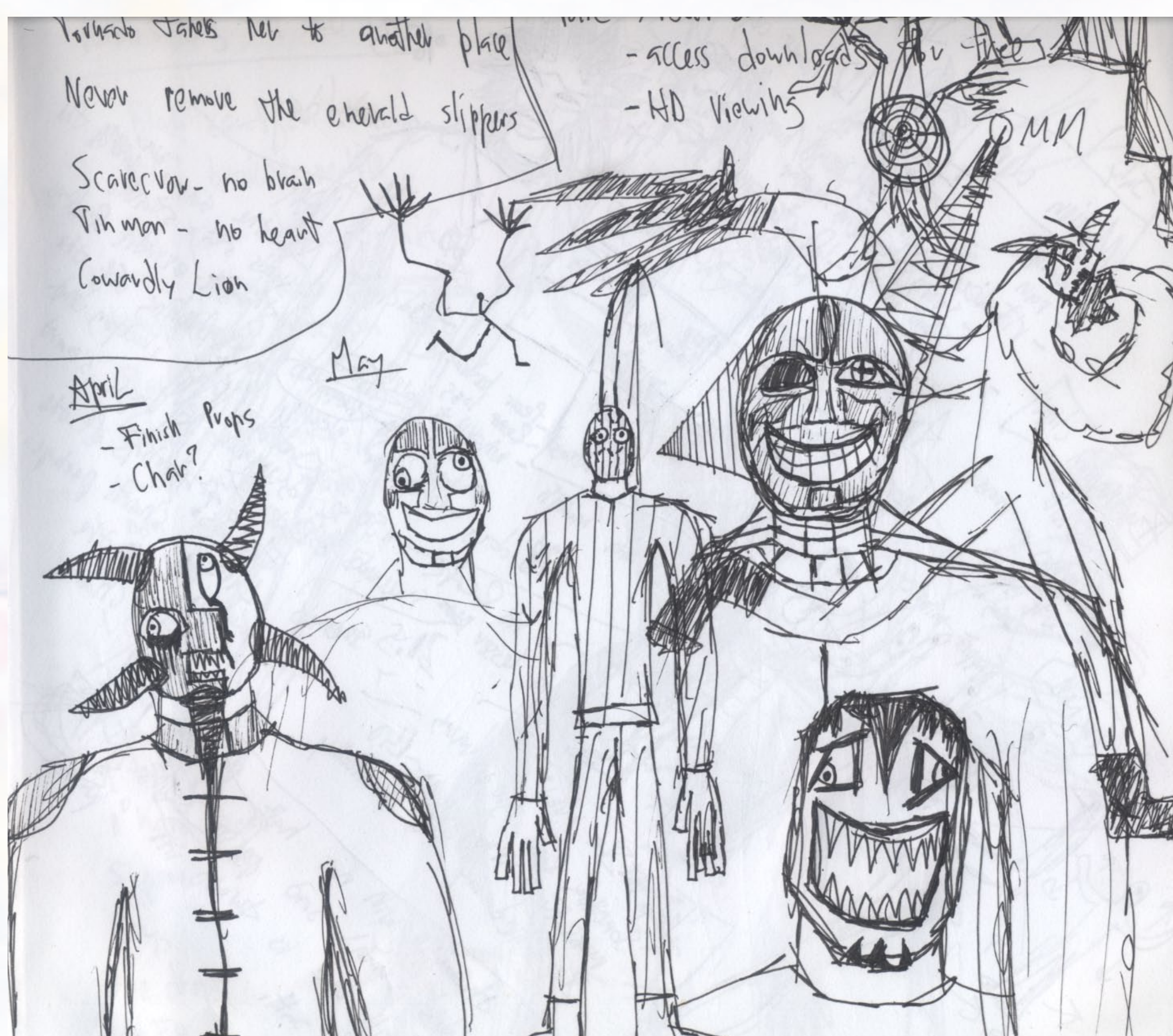
In HEART STRING MARIONETTE I'm playing with a lot of the same archetypes as I was in WE ARE THE STRANGE. I have Sam-haine Tsuke as the shadow, the mysterious loner like Rain in WATS. I have the Kid as the innocent, the child like Emmm in WATS, except this kid has more of an edge to him. I have the scorned woman in Siouxsie much like Blue was in WATS, except instead of retreating and withdrawing from her trauma, Siouxsie goes on the offensive. I have the evil dictator in Lord Wor much like HIM was in WATS, except Lord Wor is much more human than HIM. HIM was like a mythical pure evil character and Lord Wor is much more human. It's almost as if through portraying the archetypes I did in WATS, I learned from putting them through the story and NOW they have matured and appeared again in HSM in their new forms. I think any good character has bits of the theY creator inside of them, driving them. Like, yes, Marionettes. So I feel like my characters have matured much more. If they were living in a fantasy world in WATS, they have entered a much more realistic world in HSM, so I had to adapt them to it. As I mature and learn more I will of course put this into my characters.

I love all my characters in one way or another. Even the "horrible" Monsters. As a child I spent most of all my time studying and collecting reptiles, amphibians and insects. I was particularly interested in the most voracious predators amongst them. I found the behaviors of parasites most interesting. So I have a sort of a pride in developing terrifying creatures, as sort of an homage to nature's best. Appearances aside, I believe human beings are the worst Monsters walking this earth, if you judge them based on their potential for destructive force. So my Monsters usually have a little human to them, or common human vices.

So now let's get to the characters! I won't list them all here as you haven't seen the film yet and I want to keep some surprises intact.



I make nonsensical doodles all the time and more often than not they inspire real characters and designs for my films.



For some reason every character I draw looks totally insane?! 0_o

Samhaine Tsuke: The SamurimE

VISUAL: When developing his appearance I never wanted to make him look like a stereotype “Samurai” even though at the beginning I intended to make an animated Samurai film. In the beginning my main inspirations were Alucard from “Hellsing”, Trowa Barton from “Gundam Wing”, Jahred, the vocalist for (hed) p.e., Mimes and old school Eastern European Marionettes. So I started with a mostly stereotypical character with a flowing scarf, then I saw how horrible the film version of “The Spirit” was and that had a flowy scarf so it ruined flowing scarfs for me. Also it would have been a pain to run those cloth sims for every shot. I’ve always been into the look of Kabuki makeup and Noh Masks, so I planned to mix them both with his look. I would create an awesome looking Noh style Mask based on my own archetypes then I would apply some Kabuki inspired makeup. The makeup was pretty minimal as the Mask on its own carries most of the weight. I sculpted his Mask based on traditional Noh techniques, so that when viewed from different angles it portrayed different emotions.

Since he is the main character I put the most pressure on myself to make sure he looked tite, so he was probably the most edited character. I probably went through 10-15 iterations of his look. When trying to define a look I’ve found that you just need to keep grinding on it, keep refining without being afraid to start over until you’re totally excited about the look. After finalizing his character design I realized there was no place for him to sheathe a sword?! So I came up with something else that actually played into the film’s theme and made the film better in the end. So, based on my influences, you can see how some of them stuck on the final character. The body type and length of the limbs is like Alucard, his hair is much like Trowa Barton’s, the design and colors of his “clothing” is much like that of a Mime’s, and his Mask is very much inspired by Noh and Kabuki with my own flair.



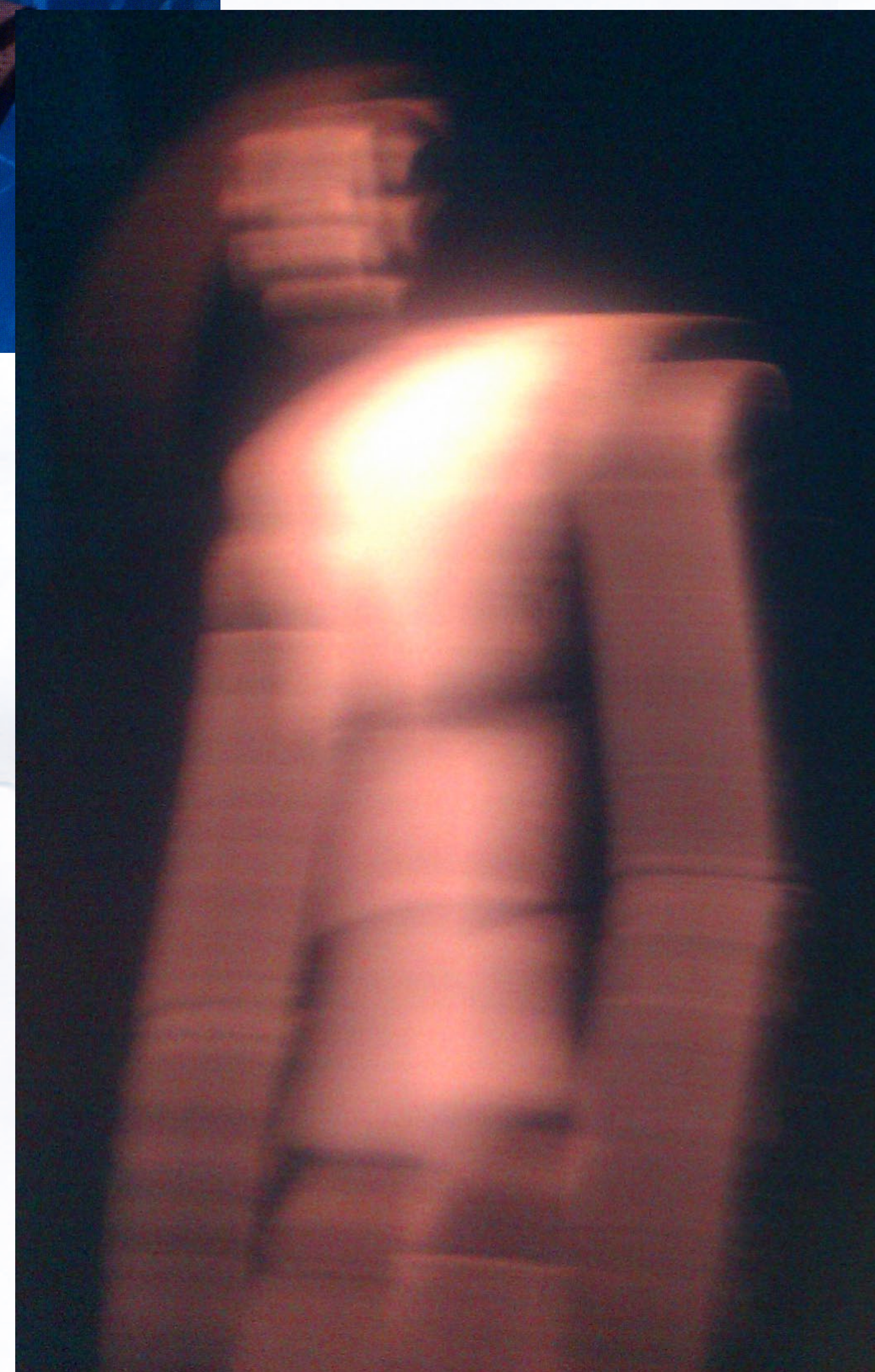
Ever seen a SAMURAI MIME before? I haven't so it got me extra excited to design Samhaine with such a concept.... it also reflects in the way he moves.



PERSONA: After reading a ton of books on screenwriting and the like I found it strange that most all them stated that your character should know what his/her goals are. I felt the mainstream literature was pushing towards one dimensional stereotypical characters. I thought about real life and no one really knows who they really are!? Let alone where they are going?! So instead of creating a “hero” who knows he is “good”, what he stands for, what side he is on, who he is and where he is going, I created a main character who is as lost in his life as most real people are in theirs. But unlike most real people who pretend to have it all figured out, then cry themselves to sleep when no one is around, Samhaine admits to his confused state. He is a mere container for his emotions, his strings pull him to and fro and he follows them without hesitation as he is the HEART STRING MARIONETTE. I sort of FEEL my characters into their mold rather than think them into it. So at the start I can’t really explain WHY I have them do things. Then as I refine the characters and story I start to find their personal truths and I edit the story accordingly. As the script goes further along I find myself deleting a lot of lines saying to myself “Samhaine would never say that?!” So the more you sit with and grind on a character the better you get to know them and once you do, once you find the heart of your character, make sure all their lines and actions are consistent with their true self.



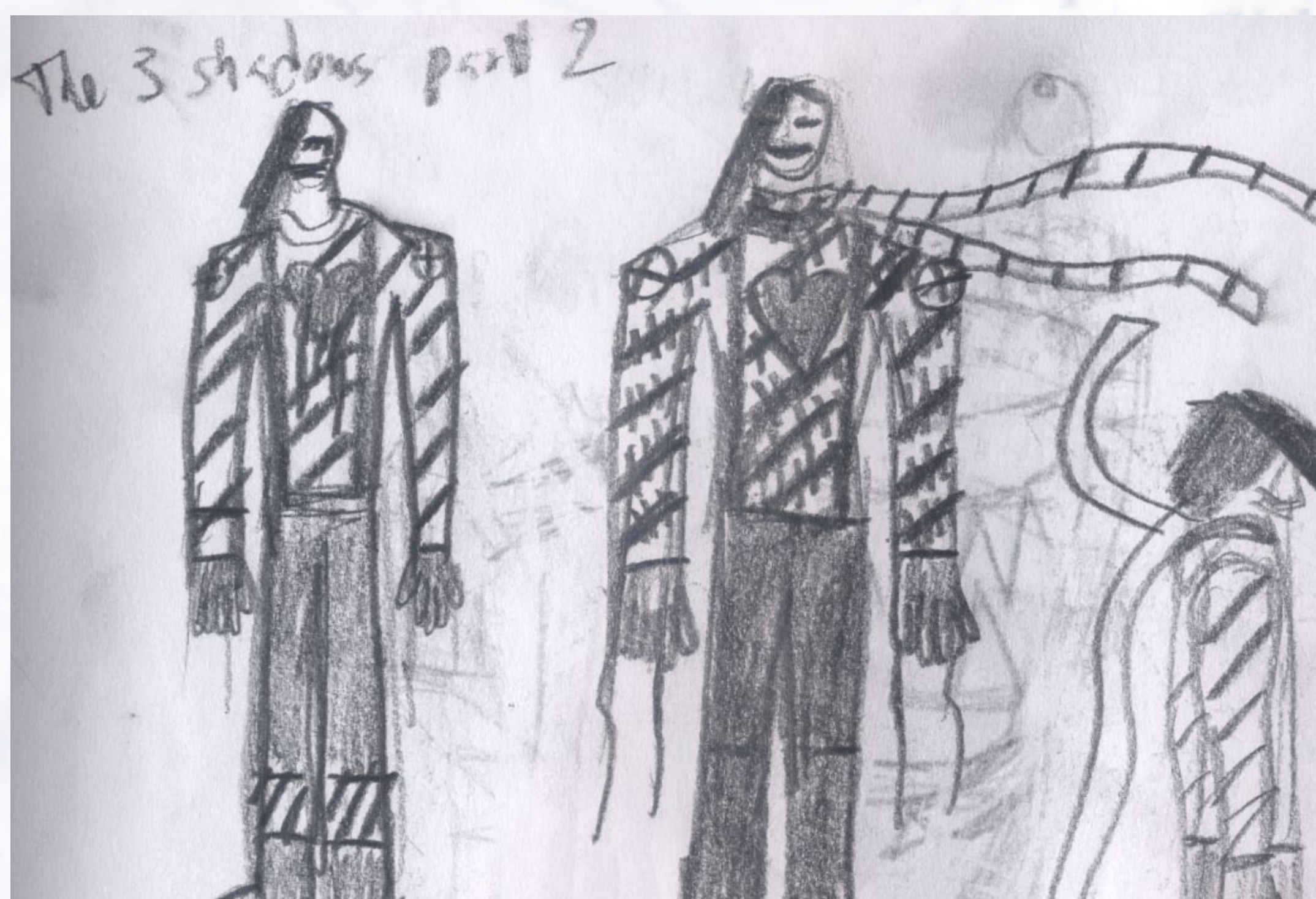
He was much stockier in earlier designs



IN THE STORY: Samhaine is a pure actor, a pure performer. He is nothing without his audience. His performance defines who he is and without a performance and an audience he is lost, he is nothing. His name is well known to most inhabitants of the HSM world, as “Samhaine Tsuke” is the name of the main character from the famous play “THE SILENT FORM”. The people cannot agree whether “The Silent Form” is based on a true story or not, but they all fear the thought of staring into the infamous MASK OF DESPAIR that Samhaine is said to wear. It’s a mystery as to if the Samhaine wandering the world of HSM is the real deal or just a delusional fan of the play. In the play Samhaine is the famed “Prince Marionette”, the last of his kind, as the people of the world have died inside and become mere Puppets. Samhaine Tsuke is a mysterious, stoic swordsman that slays Monsters and serves the silent.

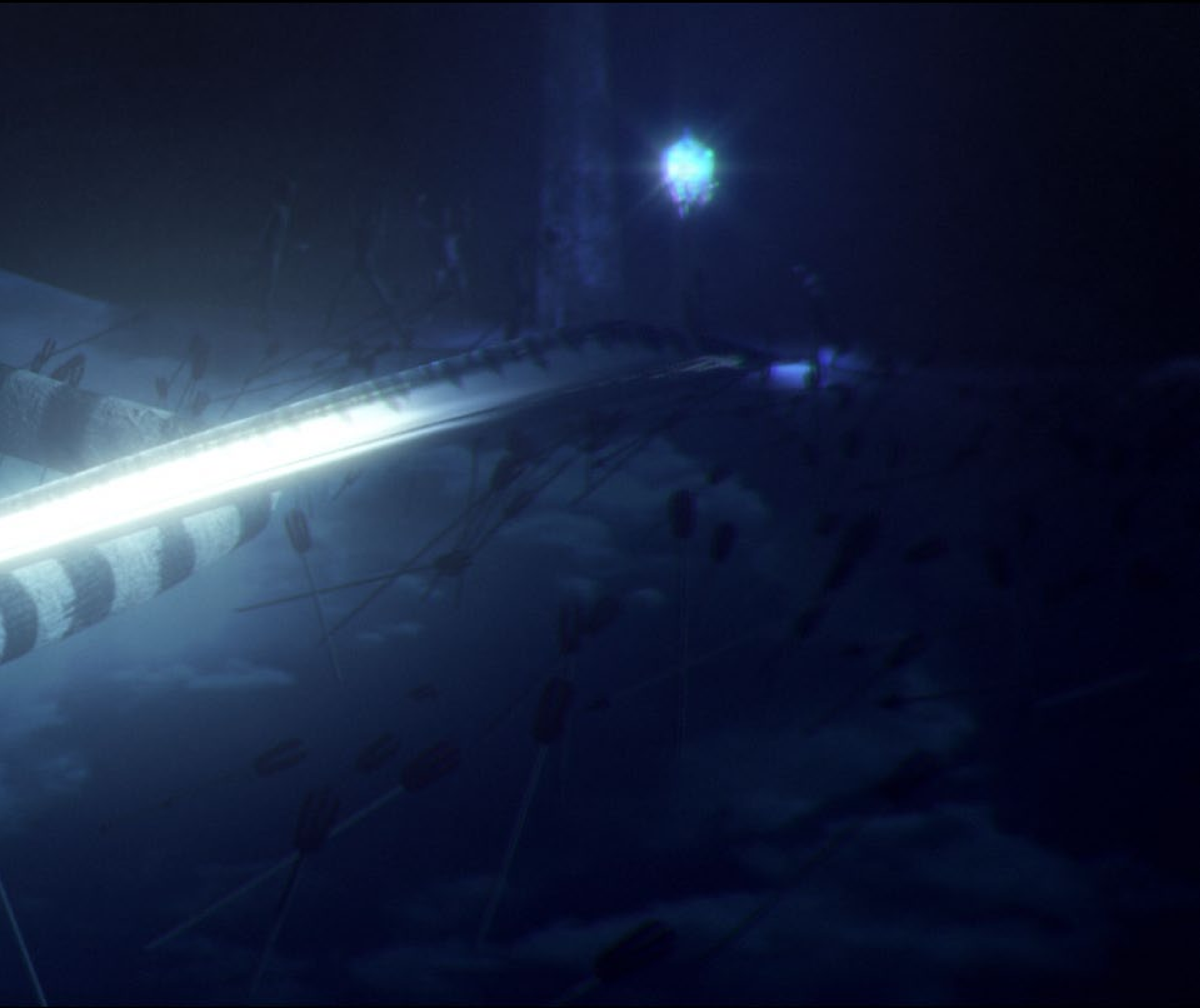
TECHNICAL: All of the male biped characters in HSM are based on

Samhaine. Once I finalized his design I used his body parts to create all the other male characters. I changed the proportions slightly for the other characters, but Samhaine was the blueprint. Since his arms are so long I was able to wrap them around his body when swinging his sword, “breaking the joints”, which allowed me to do some really tight poses and breakdowns. His rig was really light and fast as there weren’t many controls. For all of his sword-fighting stuff I used FK to animate him, which really worked well for the jerky stopmotion style I used for him a lot of the time. I animated him differently than the other characters, as I used a lot of FK with hold keyframes. I animated him just like a stopmotion puppet as I had to add a key and move all of his controllers every two frames. So he moves unlike the other characters, which further alienates him from the “Puppets” in the story. I also used some procedural solutions to animate him when he’s swinging his arms and the like. I used Cinema 4d’s Xpresso system with “C4d Jack’s” oscillate plugin to drive his joints in certain shots. He is supposed to be a character from a play following a script, so I wanted his movements to be like clockwork in certain shots. Overall he was really fun to animate with the stopmotion style and weird procedural stuff.



After seeing how lame that movie “The Spirit” was I quickly DITCHED the scarf ^ ^





Destiny's Son style ^ ^ Checkout the old Samurai film "Destiny's Son" for reference

↓ 100 Alucard ^^

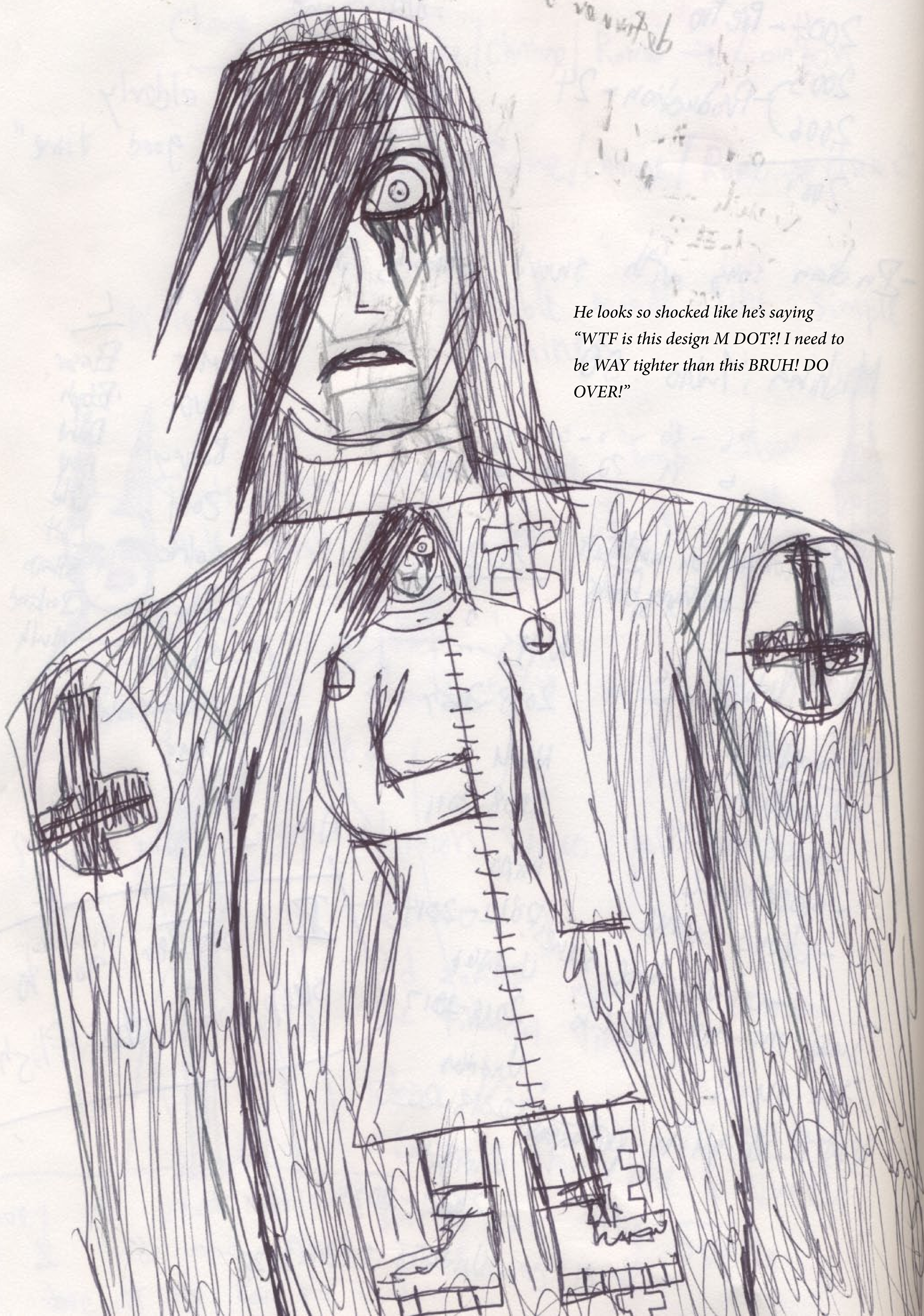


Unprofessional Performance
- NO transitions
- Using alcohol to deal with low self confidence

- Creepy but not too creepy
so that he's not a hero
- borderline hero/creep

son





He looks so shocked like he's saying
"WTF is this design M DOT?! I need to
be WAY tighter than this BRUH! DO
OVER!"

- Dali theater paintings



- Dali thumb tree

- body with tree branches

I saw a Dali exhibit in London and it looks like these were my notes on the tight stuff I saw there...

- Not a "Samurai" film

- Not set in feudal Japan



Lots of
Wear
+
Cracks

Teeth
like
carved
in wood

Experiment
with
hard edged Zbrush

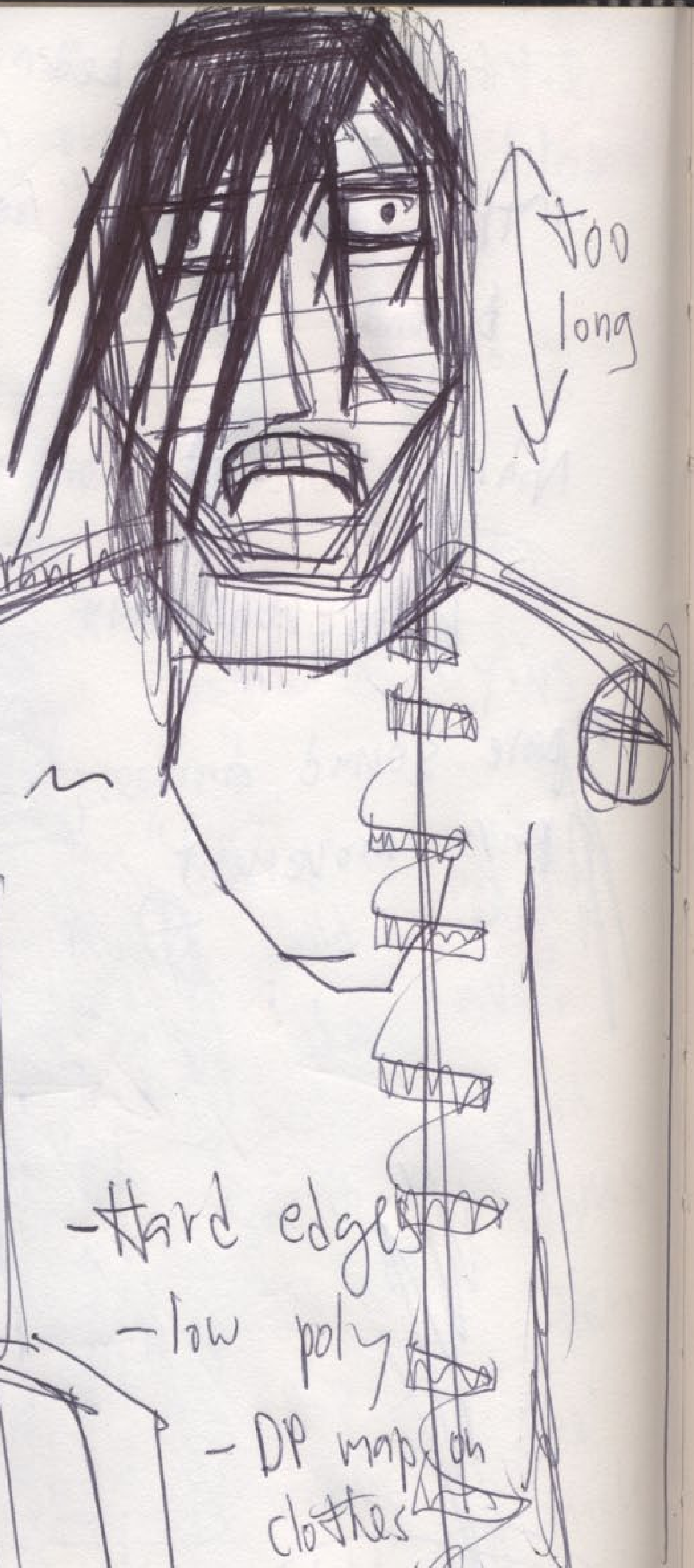


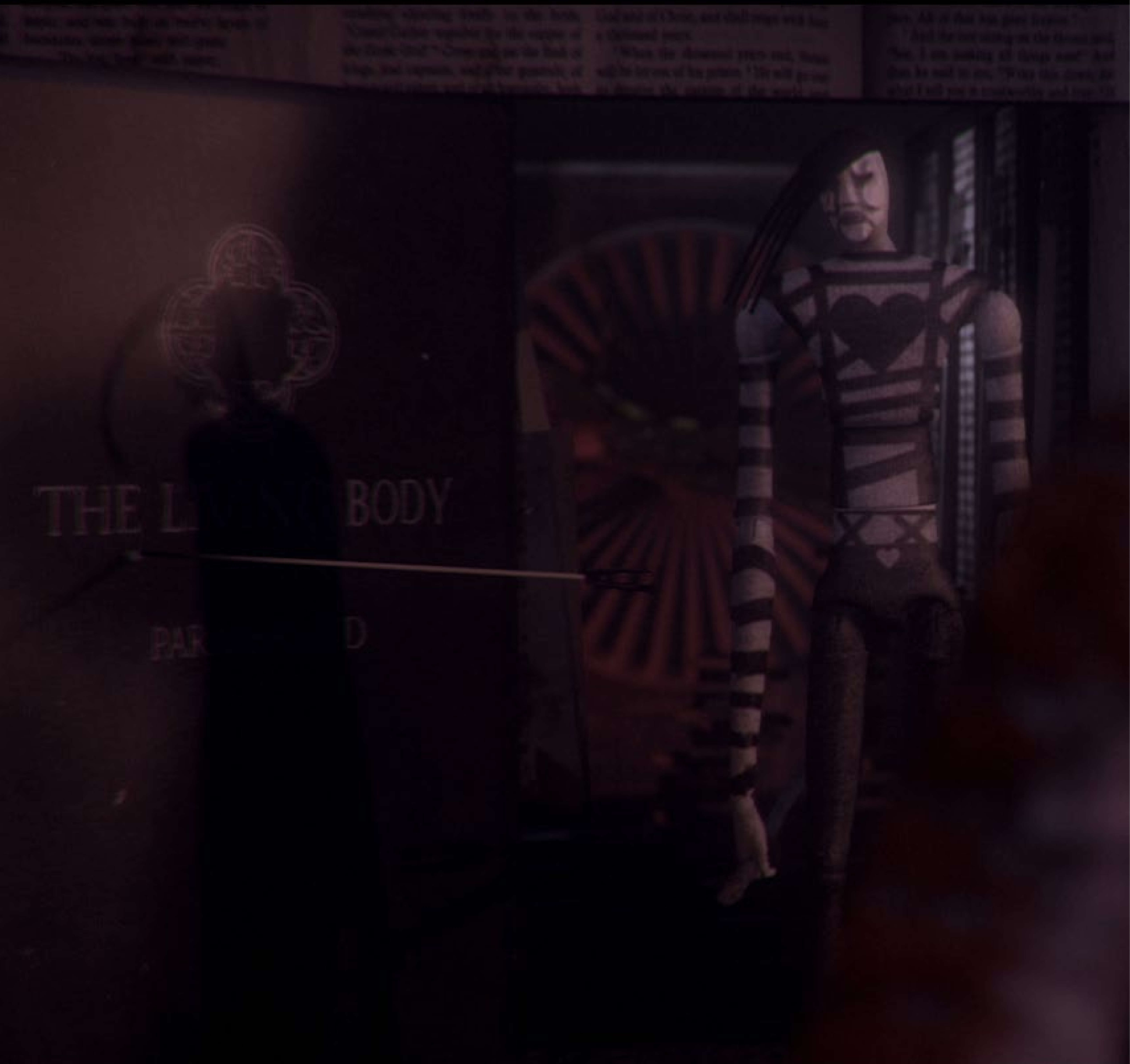
- Hard edges

- low poly

- DP map on
clothes

- Like papercraft







Siouxsie Silen: More Bounce to the Ounce

VISUAL: I've always been interested in images that were sensual and horrifying at the same time. So I wanted to create a character so that visually you wouldn't be sure if you were supposed to be titillated or horrified. I learned a lot from the anime shows that are played during prime time in Japan. They all contained a fair amount of "fan service", usually in the form of super busty female characters with a good amount of "gainaxing". My motivation wasn't just to have a chance on Prime Time in Japan! I looked at a few of my favorite series like "Hellsing" or "GunXSword" and they all had these female characters that didn't detract from the shows or ruin them in my opinion. Also it would give me a chance to flex my comedic muscles with the potential of

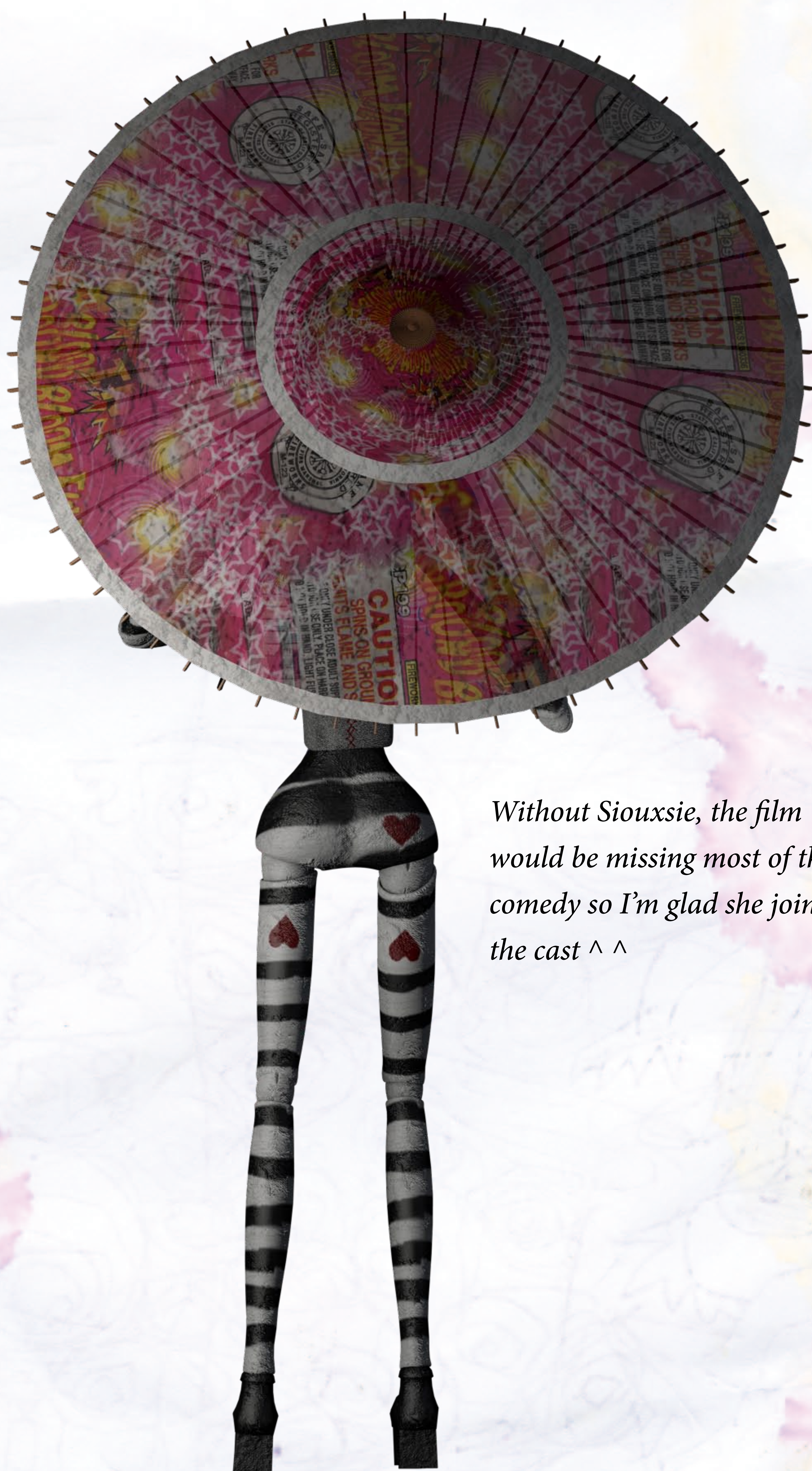
Siouxsie wasn't even in the first draft of the script as there was a different female lead BUT she worked her way into the final film somehow? I think she told me something like "If you put me and my amazing gainaxing powers in the film we'll make millions!" So I was like ok I'll give it a try.

"gag boobs". The biggest influence on Siouxsie's character both visually and energetically would probably have to be the character "Oriha" from the film "GOYOKIN". I referenced that character both when designing Siouxsie's look and attitude. Originally I was going to give her extensive tattoos, but since I hate the whole "sleeve" trend, where normal hipsters now get all tatted up like Yakuza, it makes the whole tattooed look pretty cliché and lame. So I decided to only give her a few tattoos to prevent my starlet from looking like a common hipster. Her hair, which I animate like another character in many shots, was inspired by Alita's mini avatar from the "Battle Angel Alita" manga and it's attitude is very much like ORI from WATS.

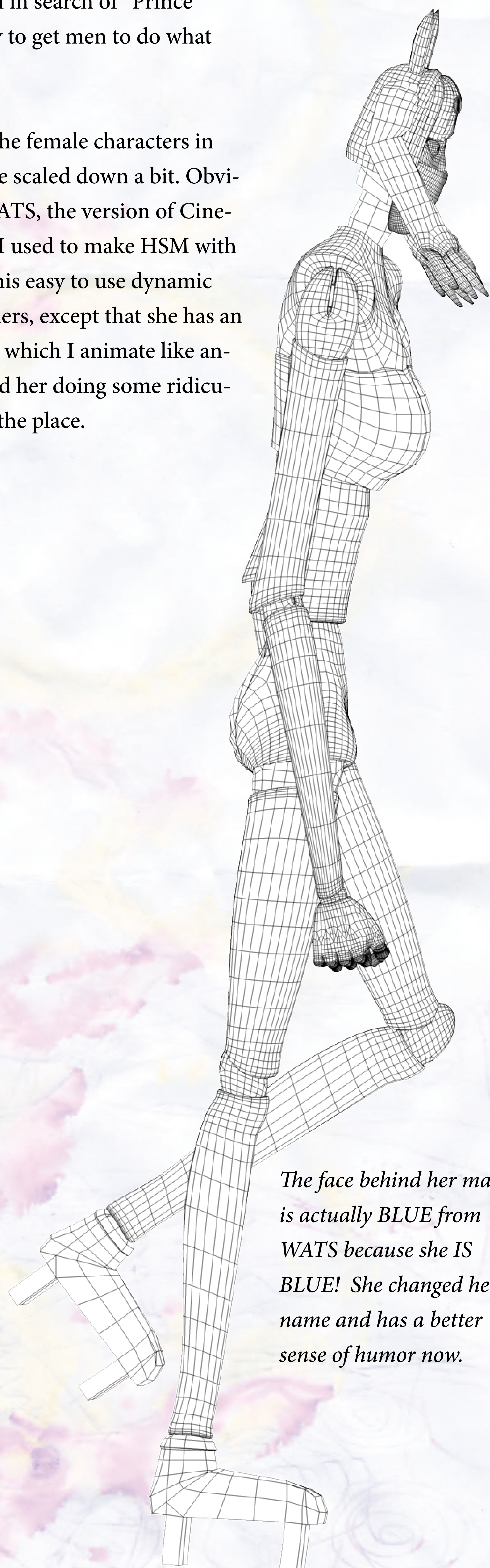
PERSONA: Siouxsie is like a tougher version of Blue. They were both strippers who were abused or scorned in some way, but unlike Blue who retreats, Siouxsie is out for revenge! She's a woman that has been abused and wants to punish those who were behind it. My favorite female character from anime would have to be Kagero from "Ninja Scroll" as she was a strong woman, but she still had a tender heart as much as she resented it. I couldn't say she had much influence on Siouxsie though, as Siouxsie is not a warrior. The biggest influence on Siouxsie's character came from "Oriha" from the film "GOYOKIN", as she was full of attitude and a beautiful woman, who men were afraid of. Siouxsie is the diva with the poison tongue.

IN THE STORY: When we meet Siouxsie she is riding in a pallaquin in search of “Prince Marionette”. She’s a famous stripper that knows how to use her body to get men to do what she wants. She’s not out for love, she’s out for revenge.

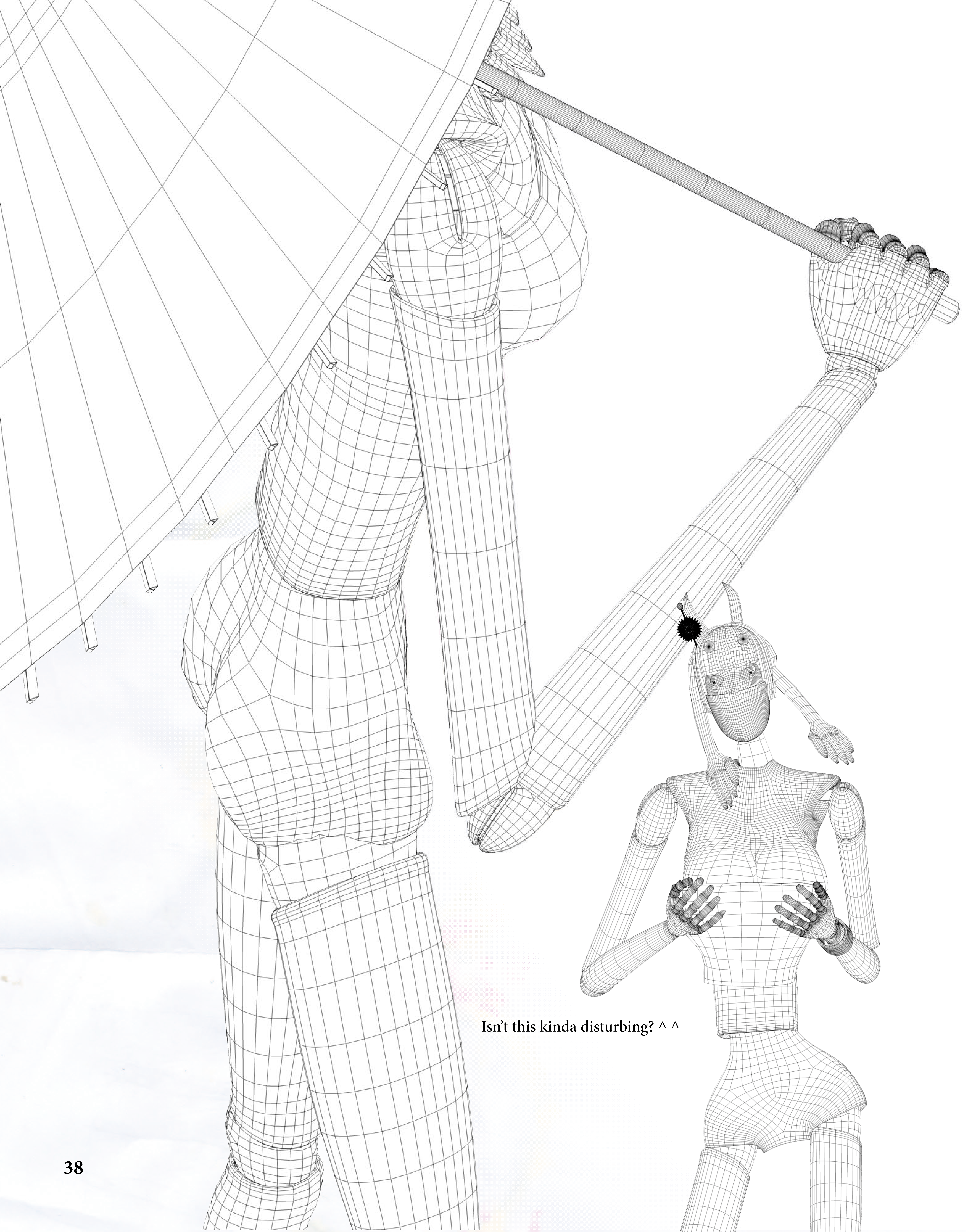
TECHNICAL: Siouxsie’s body parts are the master template for all the female characters in HSM. All the body parts are the same as Samhaine’s, though they are scaled down a bit. Obviously, the hips and chest are different parts as well. When I made WATS, the version of Cinema 4d I was using didn’t have the “jiggle deformer”, but the version I used to make HSM with did. And I used it a lot! If I get 10x as many male viewers by using this easy to use dynamic sim, why not? Siouxsie’s rig is the same as Samhaine’s and all the others, except that she has an additional rig attached to her head tip controller to control her hair, which I animate like another character in many shots. She was pretty fun to animate as I had her doing some ridiculous things as she always seemed to be angry and bouncing all over the place.



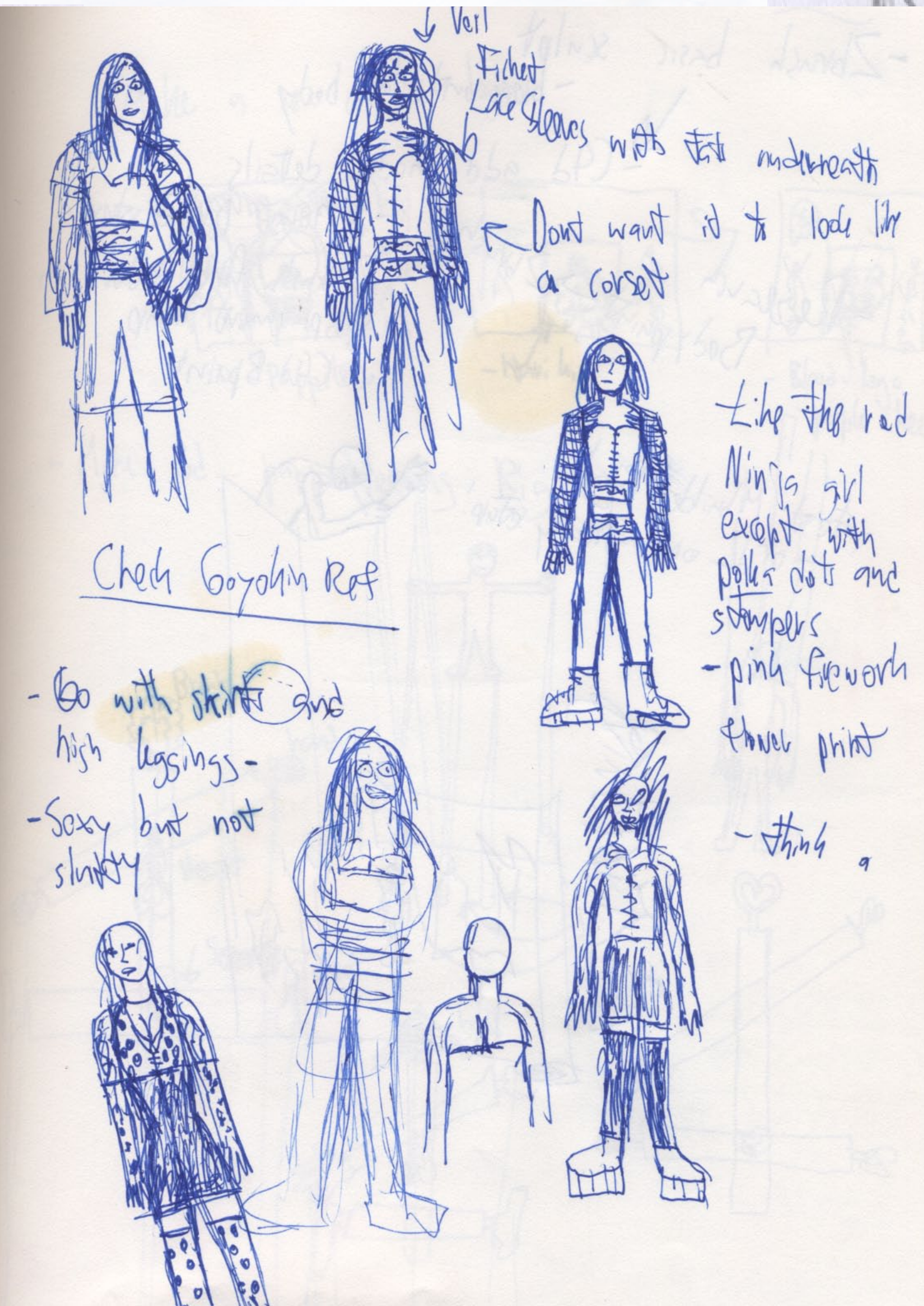
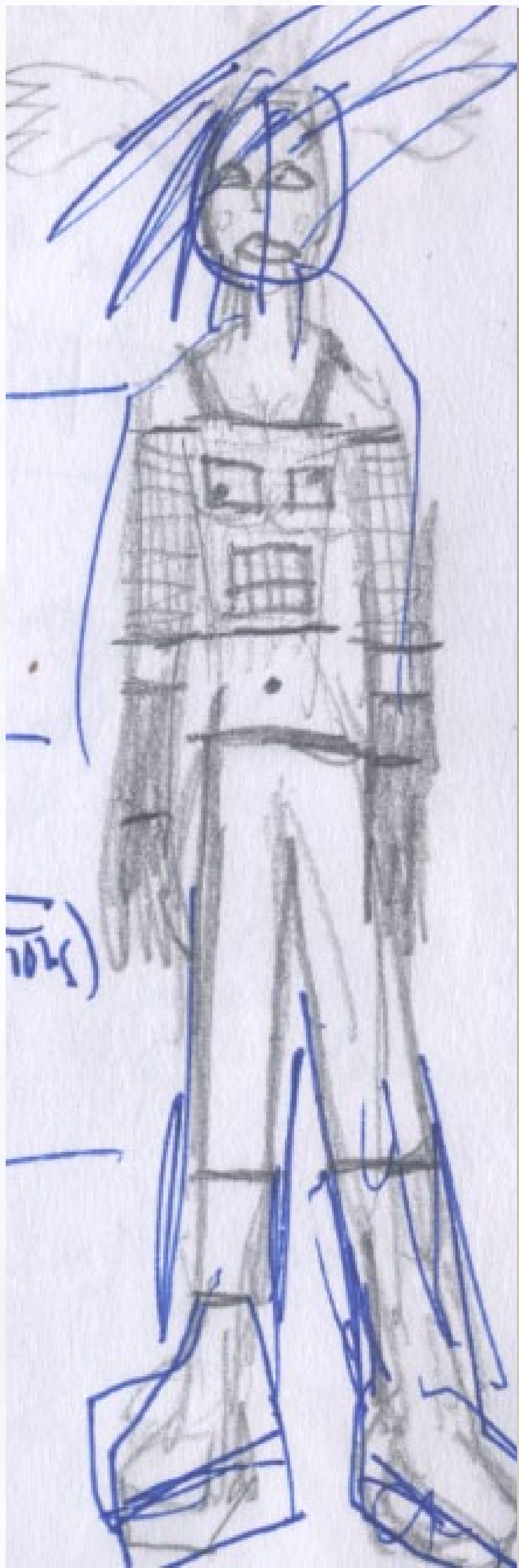
Without Siouxsie, the film would be missing most of the comedy so I'm glad she joined the cast ^ ^



The face behind her mask is actually BLUE from WATS because she IS BLUE! She changed her name and has a better sense of humor now.



Isn't this kinda disturbing? ^ ^



Initially NONE of the characters were built like marionette's...it wasn't until later, after they were ALL already modeled, that I went back and made them M.arionette's

Sianxie







Siouxsie shine's her lantern on something terrible while walking through the mountain pass





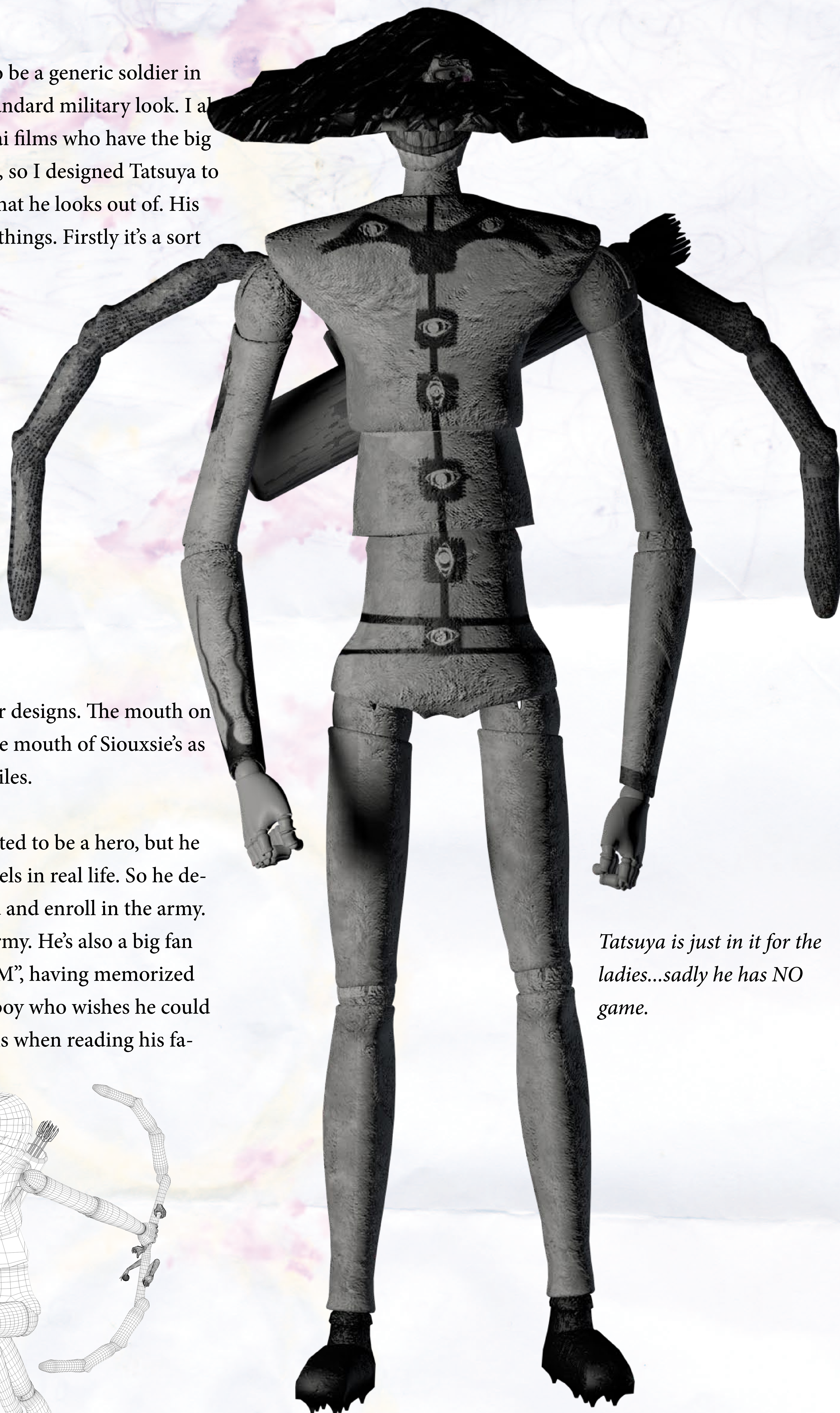
Siouxsie is not impressed with your performance

Tatsuya: Fanboy

VISUAL: Tatsuya is supposed to be a generic soldier in Lord Wor's army, so he has a standard military look. I always liked characters in Samurai films who have the big hat or who only display one eye, so I designed Tatsuya to have a big hat with a hole in it that he looks out of. His stringless bow came out of two things. Firstly it's a sort of commentary or some shet, like even though we can't see the strings it doesn't mean they aren't there. Secondly, since I'm a HUGE fan of Kentaro Miura's "BERSERK", I was inspired by Griffith's demon archer's bow with the eyes on it. So to add my own flair to it, I made it have doll eyes held up by doll arms, with an eye-less doll head in the middle. I'm not really a weapon fetish-

ist at all. I just like simple, clever designs. The mouth on Tatsuya's Mask is the same as the mouth of Siouxsie's as they both have store bought smiles.

PERSONA: Tatsuya always wanted to be a hero, but he didn't have any heroic role models in real life. So he decided to follow the popular lead and enroll in the army. He is an archer in Lord Wor's army. He's also a big fan of the play "THE SILENT FORM", having memorized every line of it. Tatsuya is a fanboy who wishes he could be the Tatsuya he fantasizes he is when reading his fa-



Tatsuya is just in it for the ladies...sadly he has NO game.



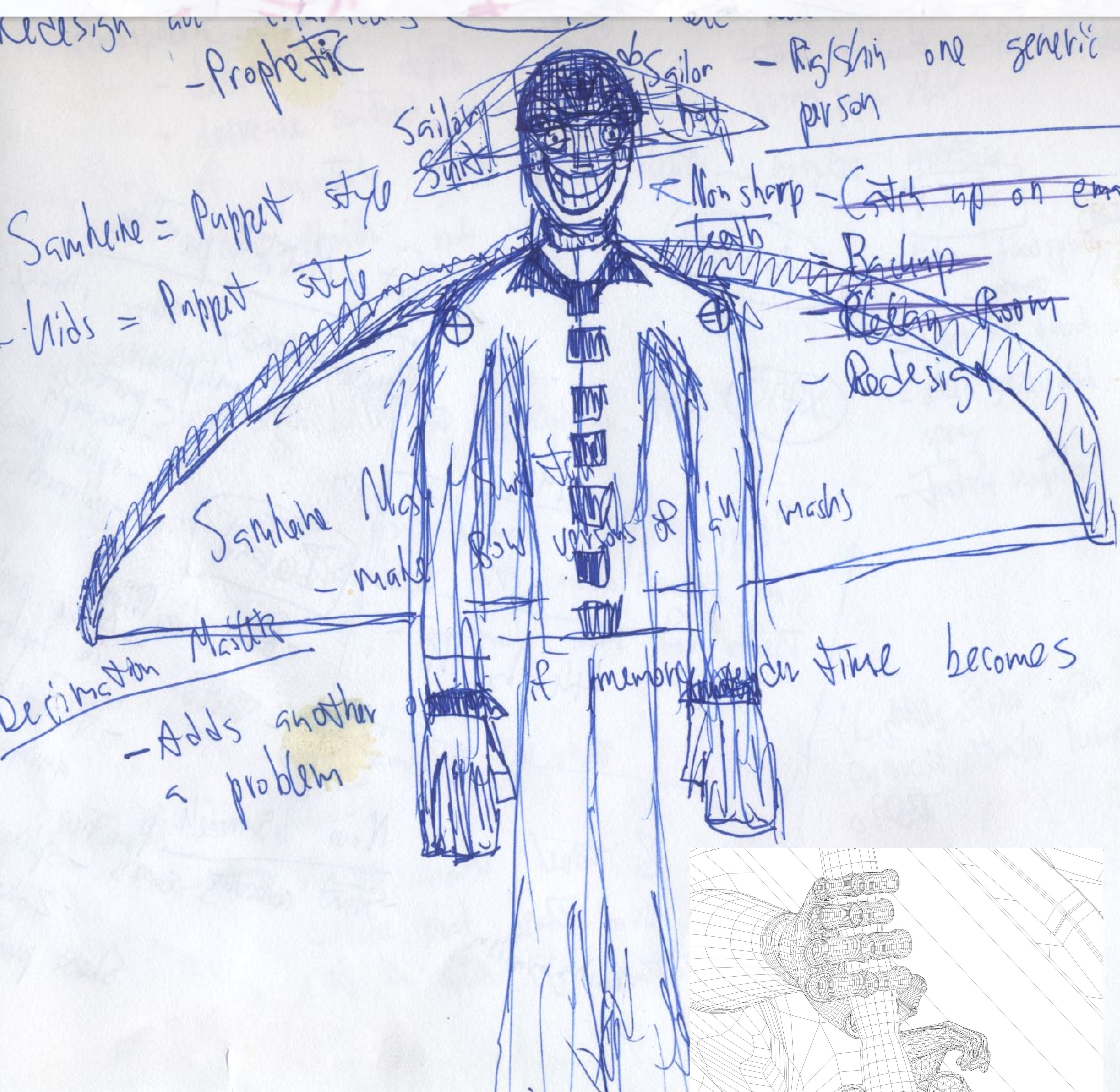
favorite fiction. He believes in the ideals put forth in his favorite fiction, but lacks the strength to stand up for his own beliefs in real life. What would happen if he were to meet his fictional idol in real life?

IN THE STORY: When we meet Tatsuya he's moping around by himself, trying out cheesy pickup lines on Mannequins. It's obvious he's unhappy with his job and just really wants a girlfriend. Easily swayed by a woman's swaying hips, it seems as if he wants to take on a new adventure chasing tail instead of doing the bidding of some old man Wor Lord.

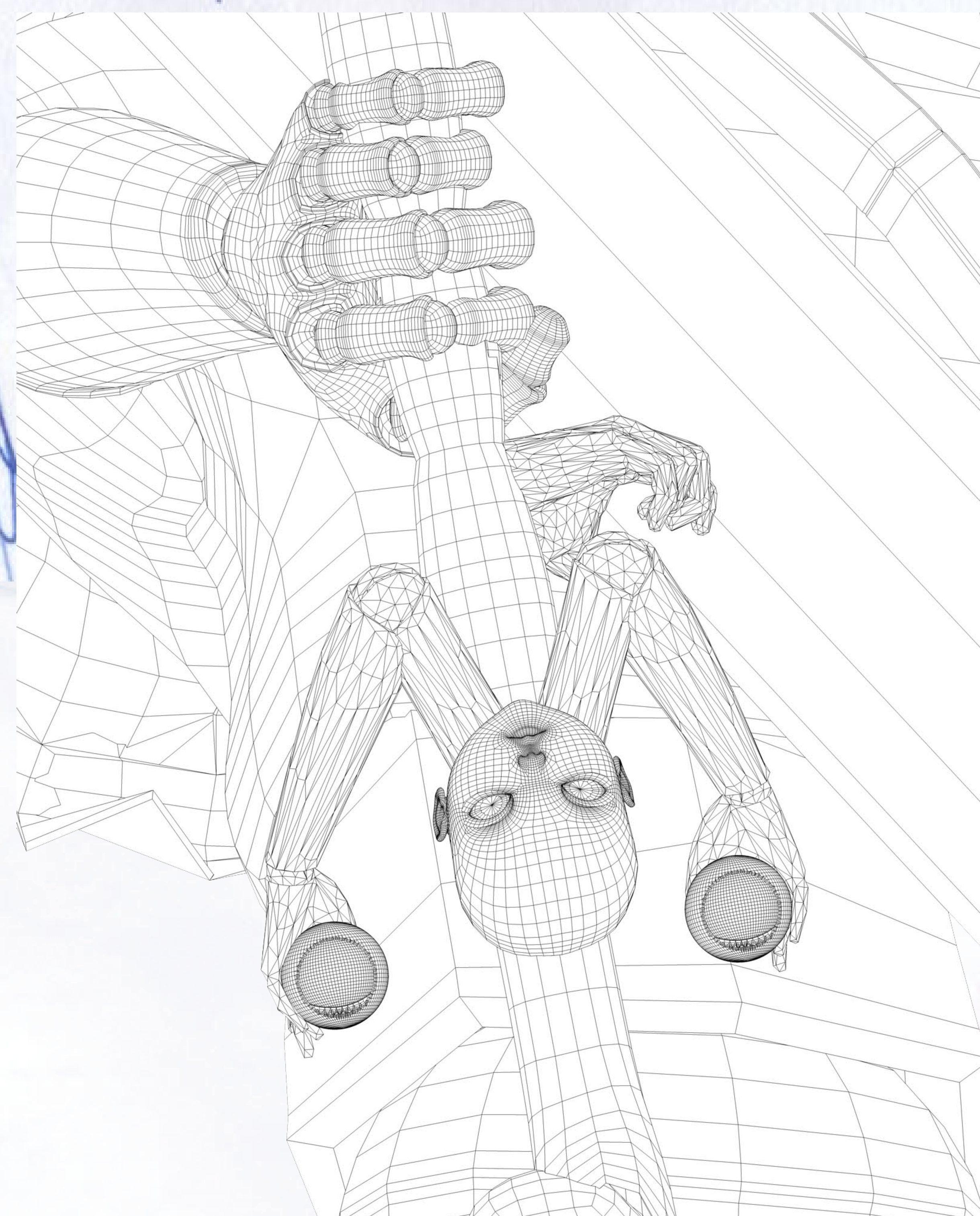
TECHNICAL: Tatsuya's model and rig are the same as Samhaine's. It's just a little shorter, with different shoes and different textures, of course. His bow has its own simple IK rig to control its flexion and extension for firing/recoil. His bow is actually made from scaled up doll finger segments. He was also a fun character to animate, as he's supposed to be goofy and awkward.

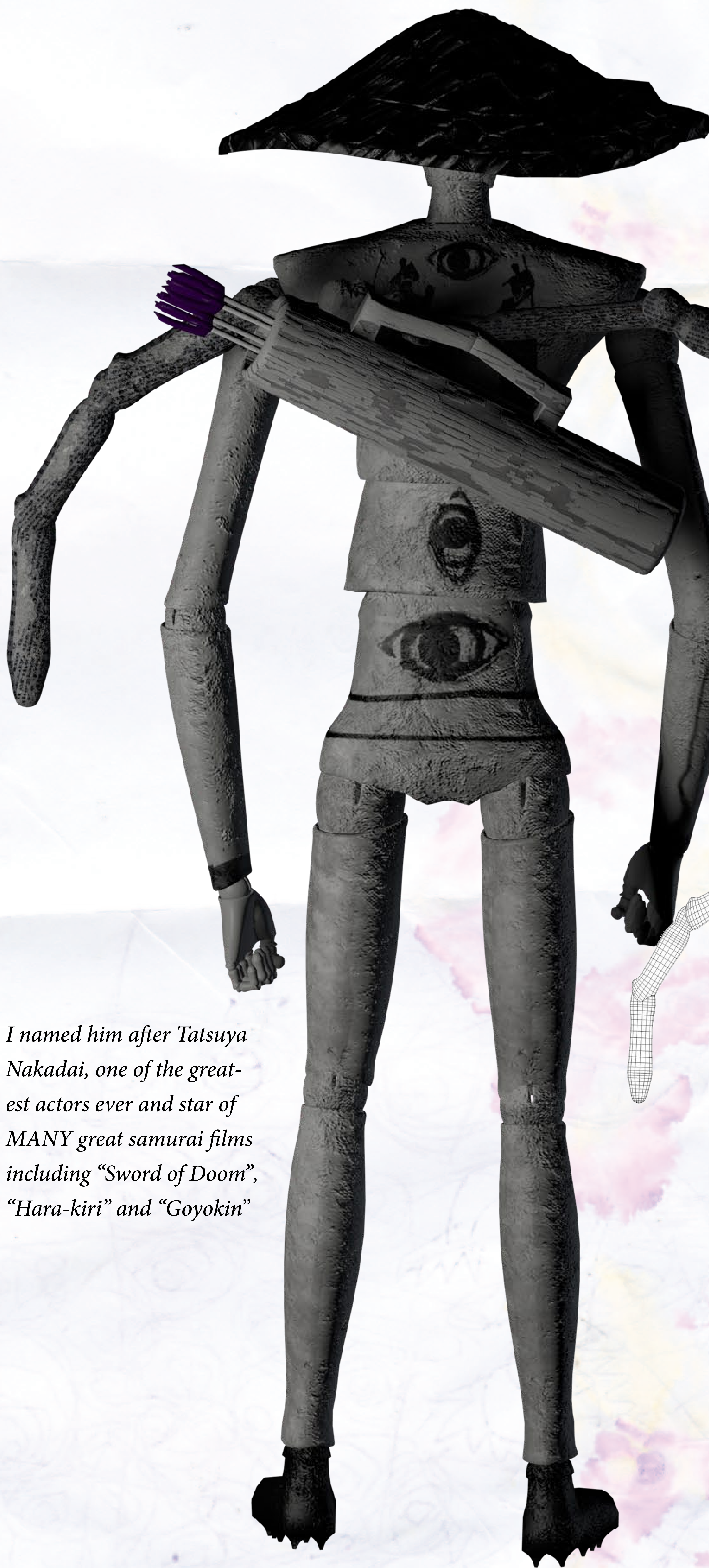
He could be seen as a sort of stalker as he's always climbing tree's to watch women... he waits for something bad to happen so he can save them and play the hero.





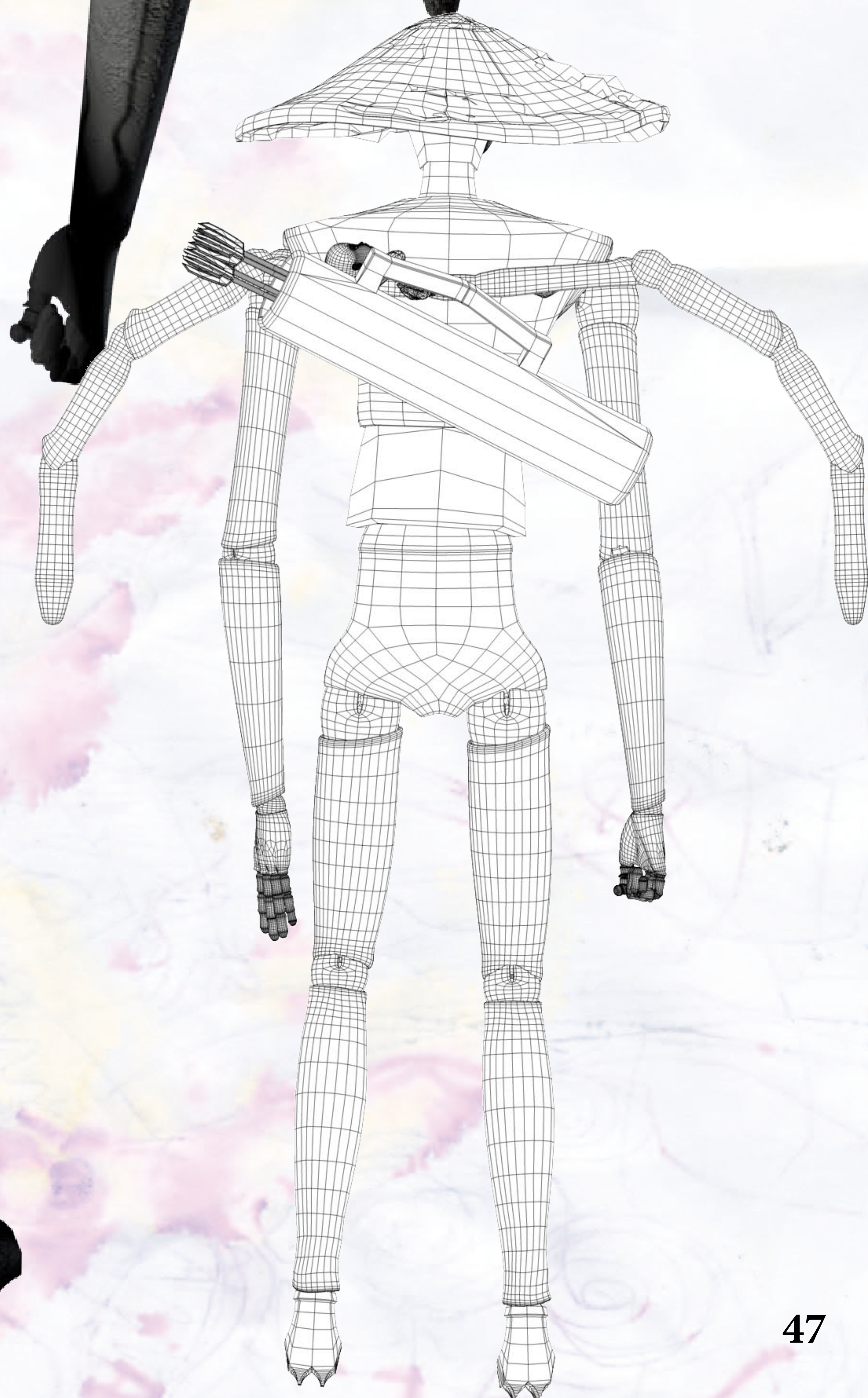
The only "concept art" I did of Tatsuya before making him





His stringless bow is made from puppet fingers. I treated much of the character creation like I did my stop-motion characters by taking bits and pieces of other objects to make them.

I named him after Tatsuya Nakadai, one of the greatest actors ever and star of MANY great samurai films including “Sword of Doom”, “Hara-kiri” and “Goyokin”







Tatsuya takes aim







Tatsuya looks over the ruins of a giant monster attack

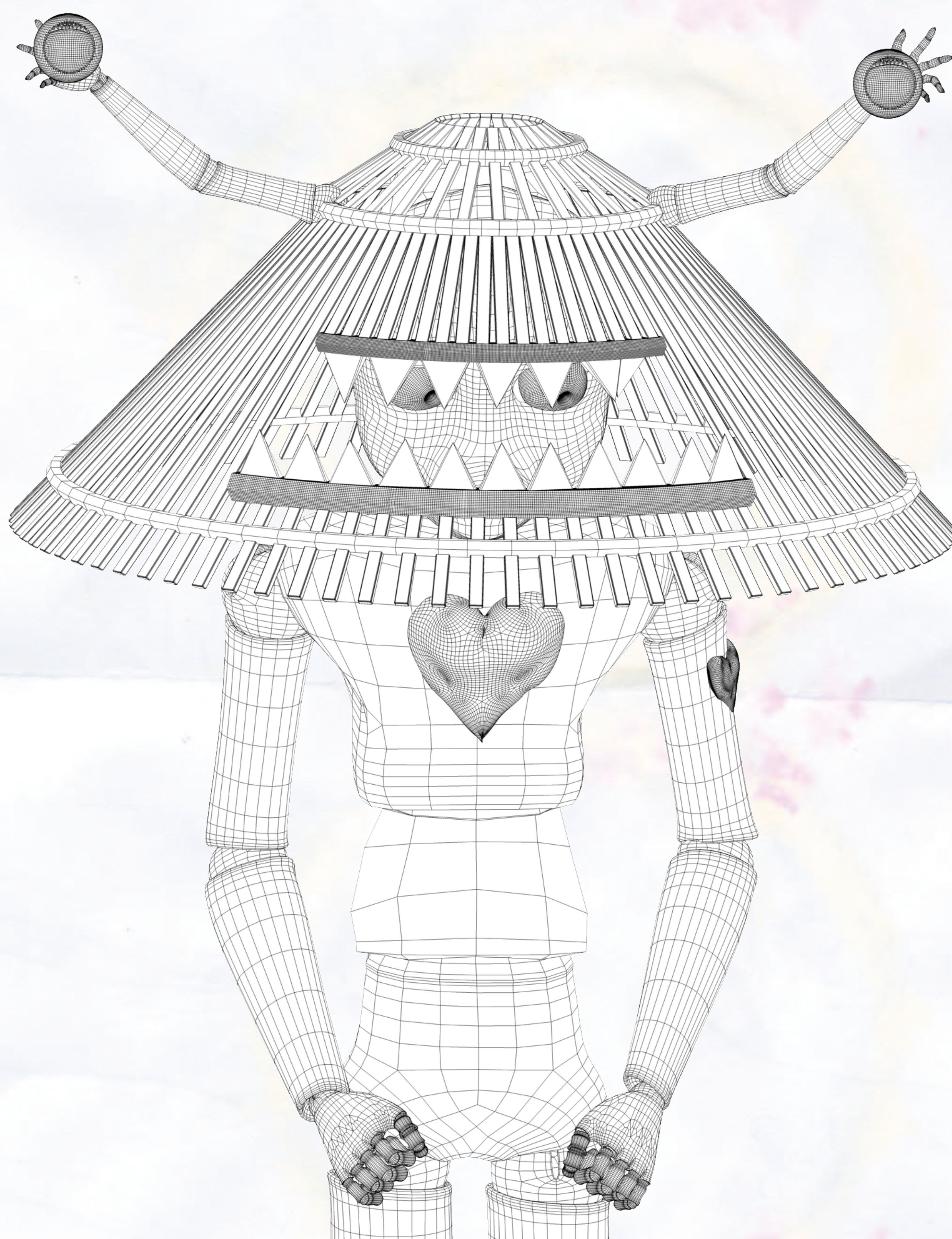
Kid: Just some Kid

VISUAL: For this Kid, I was trying to make a Marionette version of Emmm. So he is very similar to the stopmotion puppet for my character Emmm from WATS. Emmm was sort of on the border of cute/terrifying for many people and I wanted to be in the same place for this Kid. He has two different hats in the film. I designed the normal one used in the first scene and then I got the idea for the doll arm hat and used that one in his second scene just because it looked so tite!

PERSONA: Energetically this kid is sort of a more mature, jaded Emmm. He's not the pure innocent like Emmm. He knows ice cream is not the answer to all of life's problems and in his own little way he's trying to RIGHT the wrongs against him and others in the world of HSM.

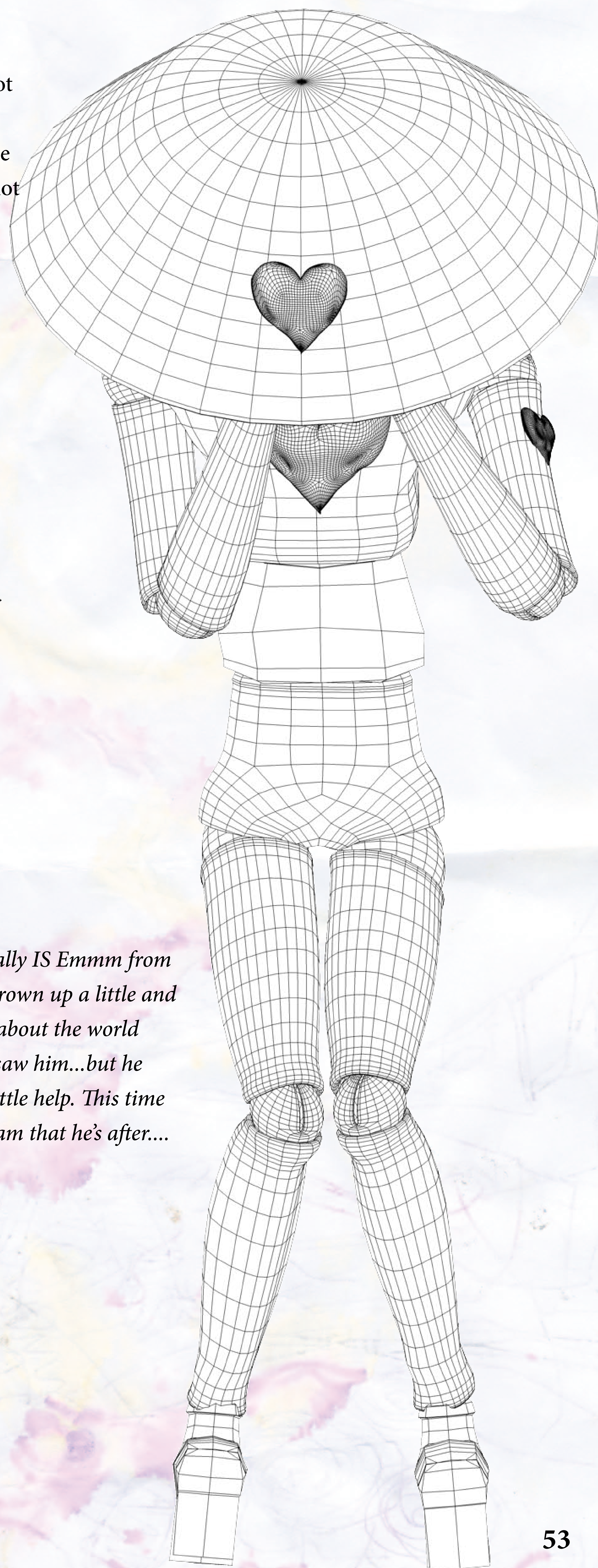
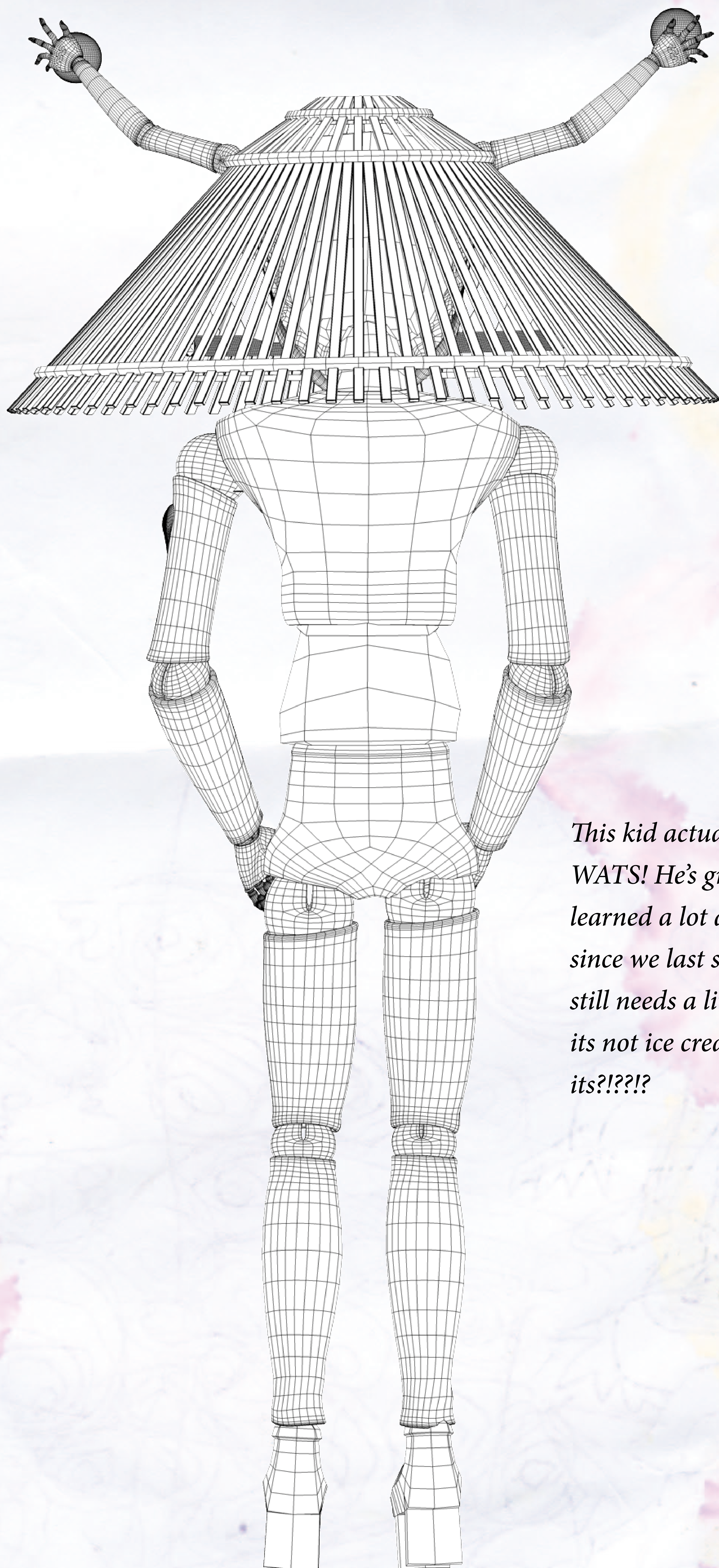
Every adult is a tortured child trying to break free from the restraints that they have let life impose on them over time.

IN THE STORY: When we first meet this Kid he's locked inside of a box in the middle of a bizarre, lonely place. Does anyone answer his cries?



I didn't do any concept art for this kid as his design was based on my stopmotion character Emmm from WATS... I just imagined he was a few years older and a M.arionette

TECHNICAL: To make this Kid I just took Samhaine's body parts and scaled them all down. Both in absolute size and I changed the proportions to be more childlike. I also added a lot of vibrate tags on his IK controllers, so he has this vulnerable shaky look to his movements. He didn't have to do any extreme motions, but the first time I saw him in a finished animated shot it brought a tear to my eye.



This kid actually IS Emmm from WATS! He's grown up a little and learned a lot about the world since we last saw him...but he still needs a little help. This time its not ice cream that he's after.... its?!?!?





The kid hears a sound from inside of his box





The Kid waits patiently for his brother to return



Lord Wor: The Wor Lord

Visual: Since Lord Wor is the “bad guy”, I revisited all my favorite bad guys as a reference. Sinistar, the Lord of Darkness in “Legend”, etc. but his final look kind of just came out of nowhere. What I did for ALL of the Masks was this: I sculpted a Mask a day for 17 days straight, then once they were all done I looked at them all and matched them with a character. Lord Wor’s Mask is one of the most striking in the film. I sculpted it the day after I did Sam-haine’s main Mask so I think there is a sort of a visual connection between the two.

PERSONA: After I watched “GunXSword”, it changed my perspective on “bad guys”. The “bad guy” in “GunXSword” was so “nice” and emotional while he did horrible things and it made him that much worse! So my shift from the archetypal “pure e_vile” bad guy, to the more realistic bad guy that Lord Wor is, was influenced by “GunXSword”. I also wanted to put him in more of a grey area so that some of the more jaded people could relate to his point of view. Part of me can relate to his point of view, but I must say part of me could also relate to HIM. So they are both real characters to me, but Lord Wor is probably more real to the less psycho people out there. Lord Wor is the father figure, the status quo, the one that does things because “that’s always how they have been done”. Lord Wor is the same as his father. Lord Wor is the corrupt regime that runs the world like deranged parents with misguided intentions.

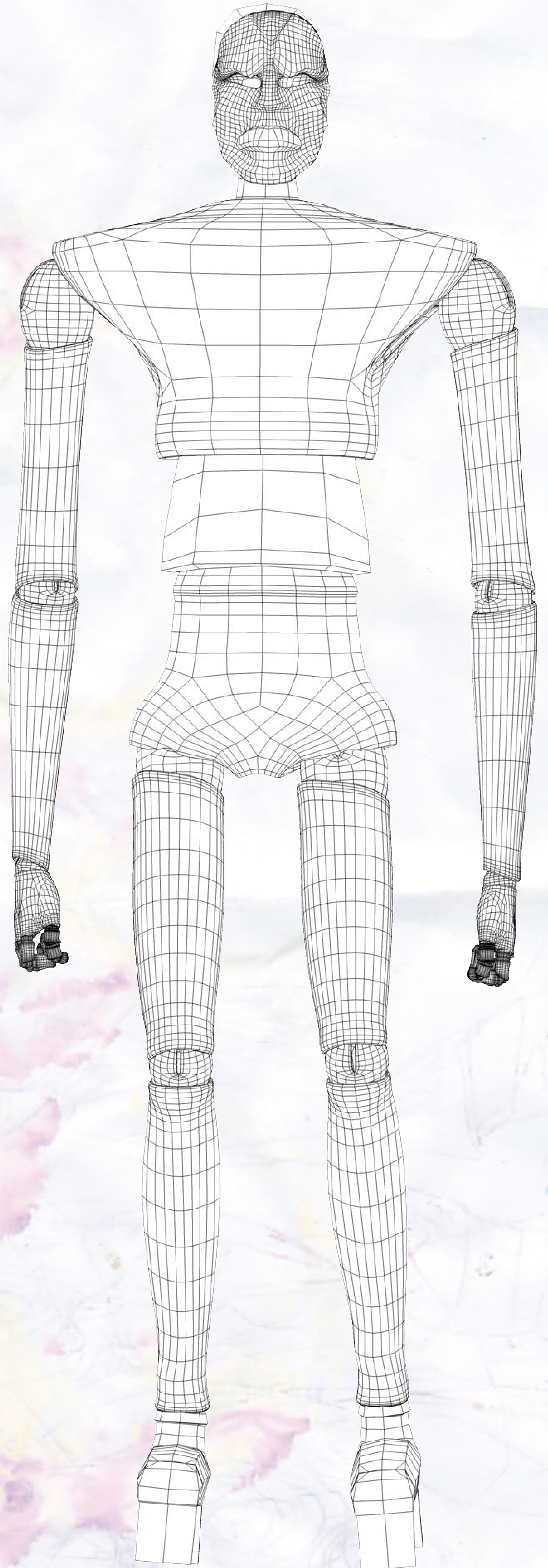
Lor Wor is the “old man”... our forefathers... the kings... the “old guard” the regime’s that control most of OUR world... he is the status quo... he thinks profits first, human interest second...



IN THE STORY: Lor Wor is the absolute power in the world of HSM. He is the boss. He has a powerful military force full of creeps and weirdos, who persecute and terrify the common people for their own recreation or profit. It is also rumored that Lord Wor has been setting loose the horrible Monsters that have been terrorizing various villages. He has never been married and has a complete disdain for children. The only thing he cares about is power.

TECHNICAL: There's nothing special about his model or rig as its the template body/rig with slightly wider shoulders.

*When I sculpted this mask I was
like WHOA this one's kinda scary
0_0*

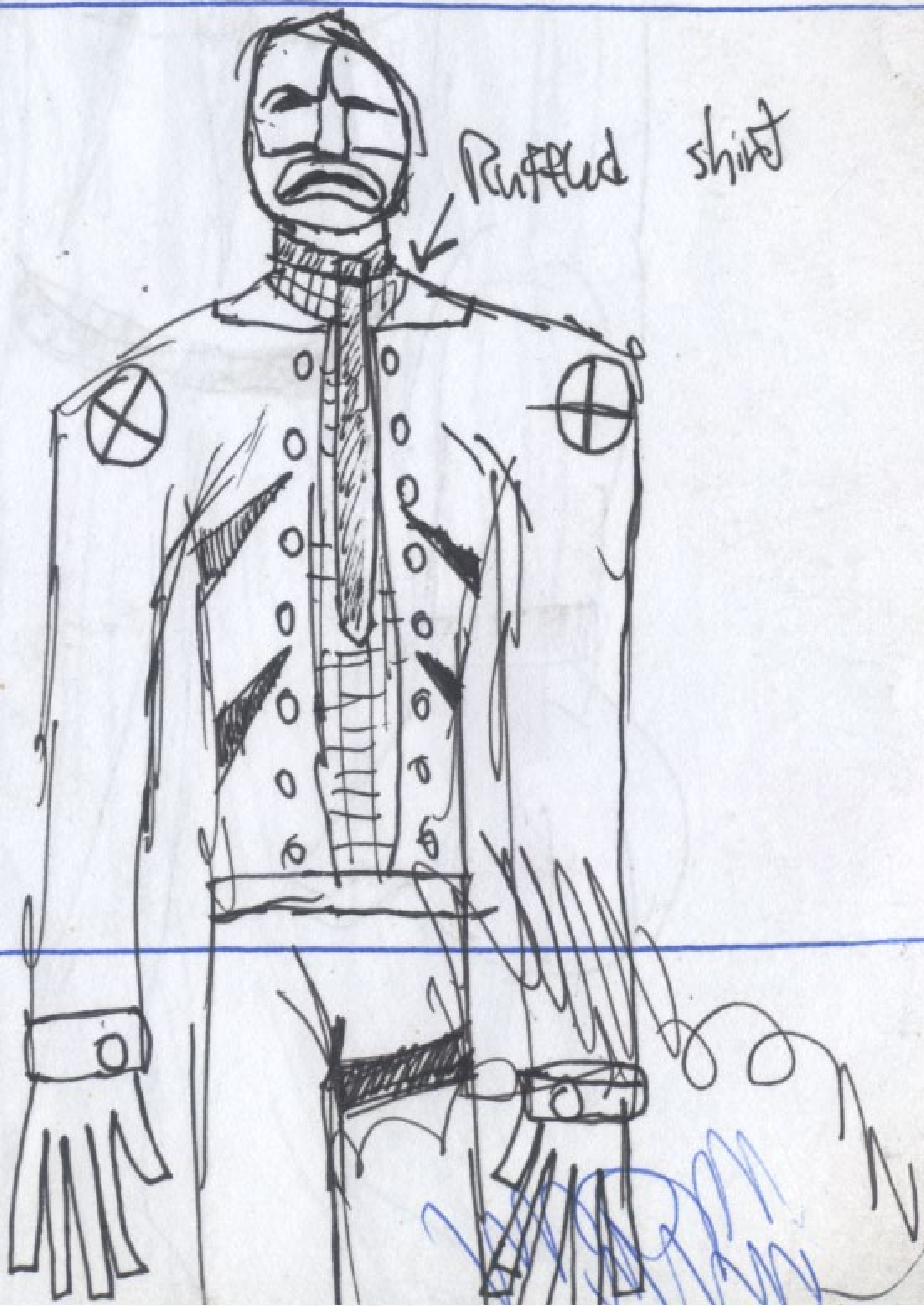


Some what Mrs. Smith

skin

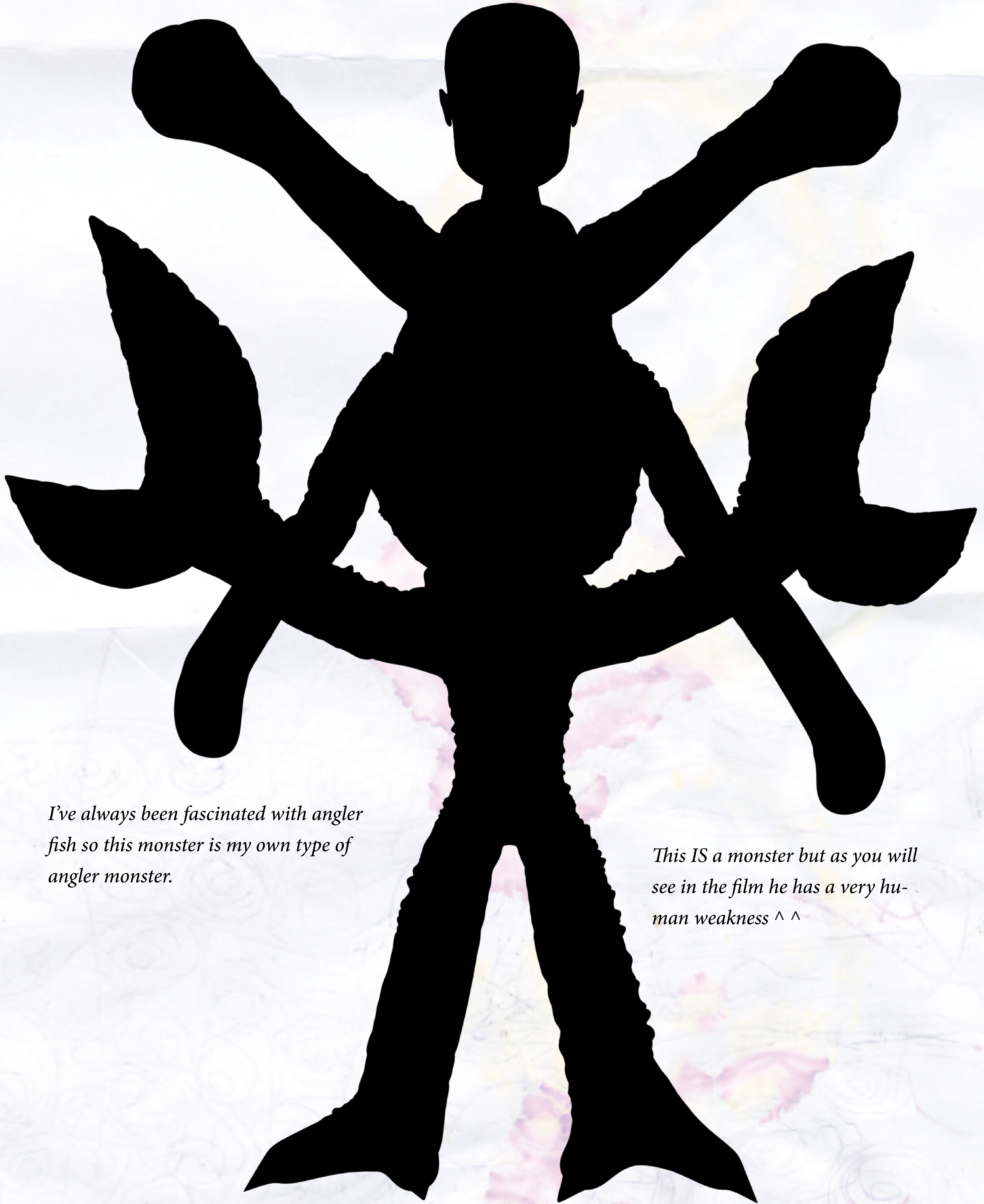
skin

Ruffled shirt



MONSTERS: Vague descriptions of some of the HSM monsters.

River Monster: This monster lives only in rivers. It's attracted by the sound of children singing. When it hears children singing it emerges from the depths and snatches them, swallowing them alive.



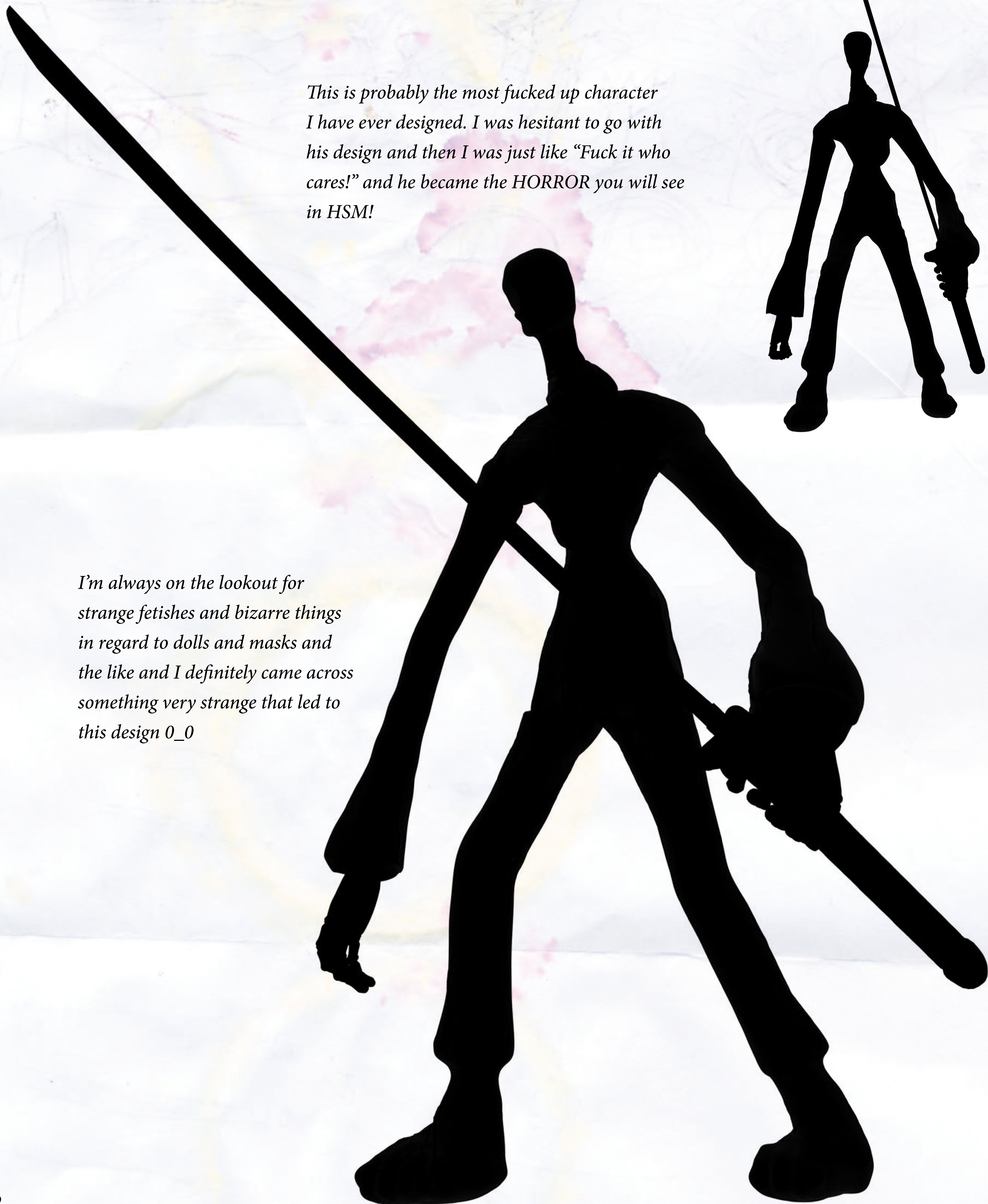
I've always been fascinated with angler fish so this monster is my own type of angler monster.

This IS a monster but as you will see in the film he has a very human weakness ^ ^

Cerealis: A sadistic psycho killer that wears a grotesque rubber suit and wields quite a perverse sword. He ambushes travelers passing through the mountains at night, skewering them in more ways than one.

This is probably the most fucked up character I have ever designed. I was hesitant to go with his design and then I was just like “Fuck it who cares!” and he became the HORROR you will see in HSM!

I’m always on the lookout for strange fetishes and bizarre things in regard to dolls and masks and the like and I definitely came across something very strange that led to this design 0_0



The Body: A psychopathic religious cult leader that sadistically pierces his followers when they come to take their “holy communion”. He has killed many families that have refused to accept his body into their own.

I was raised Catholic and I ALWAYS thought the whole “body of Christ” thing was creepy! I mean eat the flesh?! Drink the blood?! WTF! So I used those things as inspiration for THE BODY

His original design was very much like a Zombie Jesus but after modelling that character it didn't look original enough as Jesus is a TIRED mythological character so I went with a new design based a little off of the Cerealis design concept and this CREEP was born!

Since I'm an animator I'm very aware of the way people move... some people make really creepy movement's that they are unaware of...I harnessed those observed creepy movements and put them to good use with THE BODY







Two maids on their fire watch



CHAPTER 5

The Stage is SET



In this section I'll describe the sets I built for the film. In the end they all ended up being very close to my crappy concept sketches so I'll include those, so you can see my process in action. When I'm thinking about a set or location, I'm mostly focused on the mood that I'm trying to capture in that part of the film, as the set should match or help the mood. Much of the mood has to do with the way the set is lit and photographed.

In the Making Of section you can read about my production organization. When I'm setting out to make a film, I try not to be "practical" at all! Since it's 3d animation, I can have as many sets as I want and they can be as big as I like. But I don't create a ton of big, detailed sets just because I can. If I was setting out to create "Set Piece - The Movie", like many visual FX driven shorts I have seen, perhaps I would give a fuck, but I'm not out to impress other artists or get a job through my demo reel-ish film. Thus I do what the story demands.

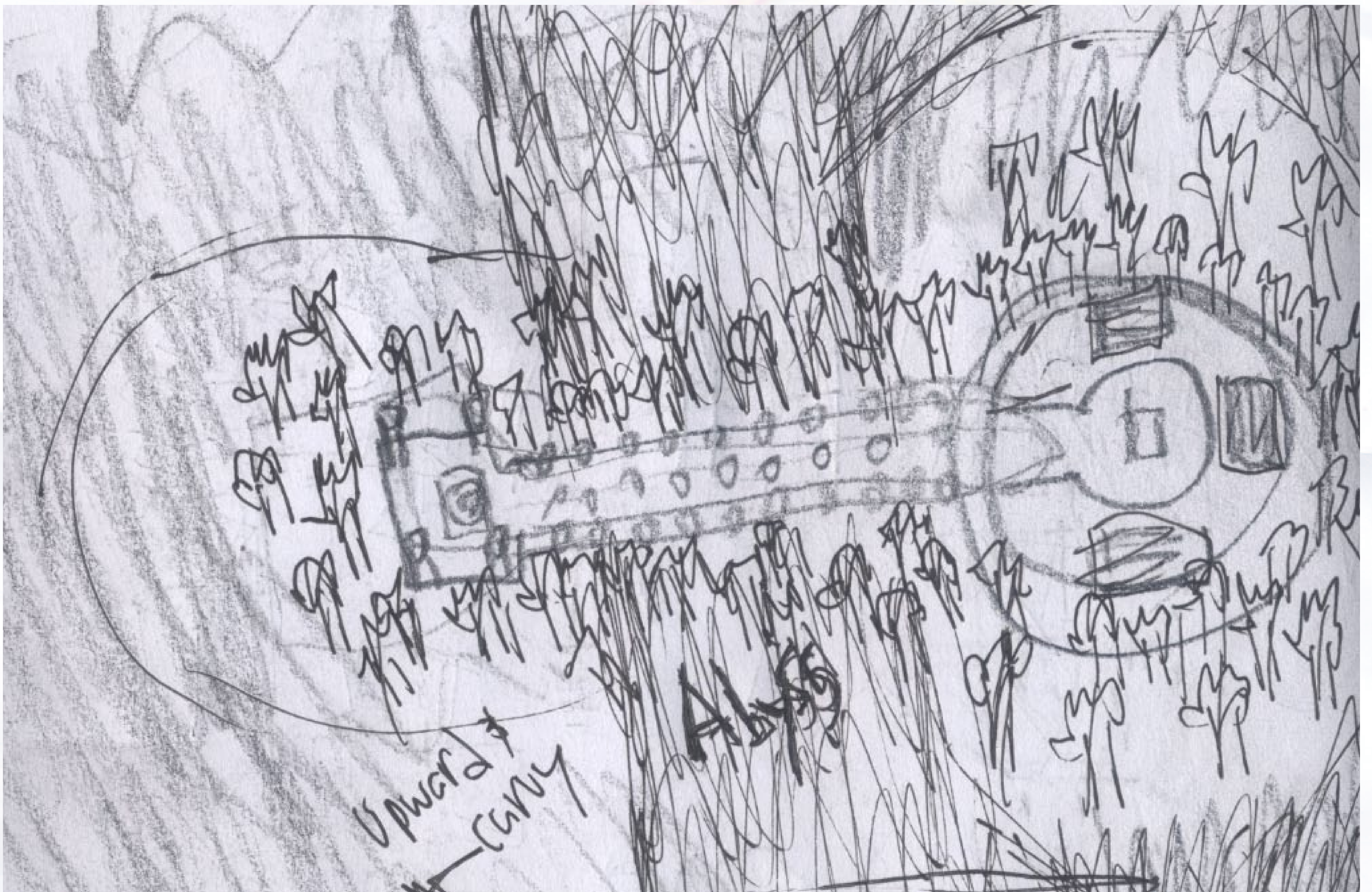
So let's get to the sets!

THE NETHER WORLD:

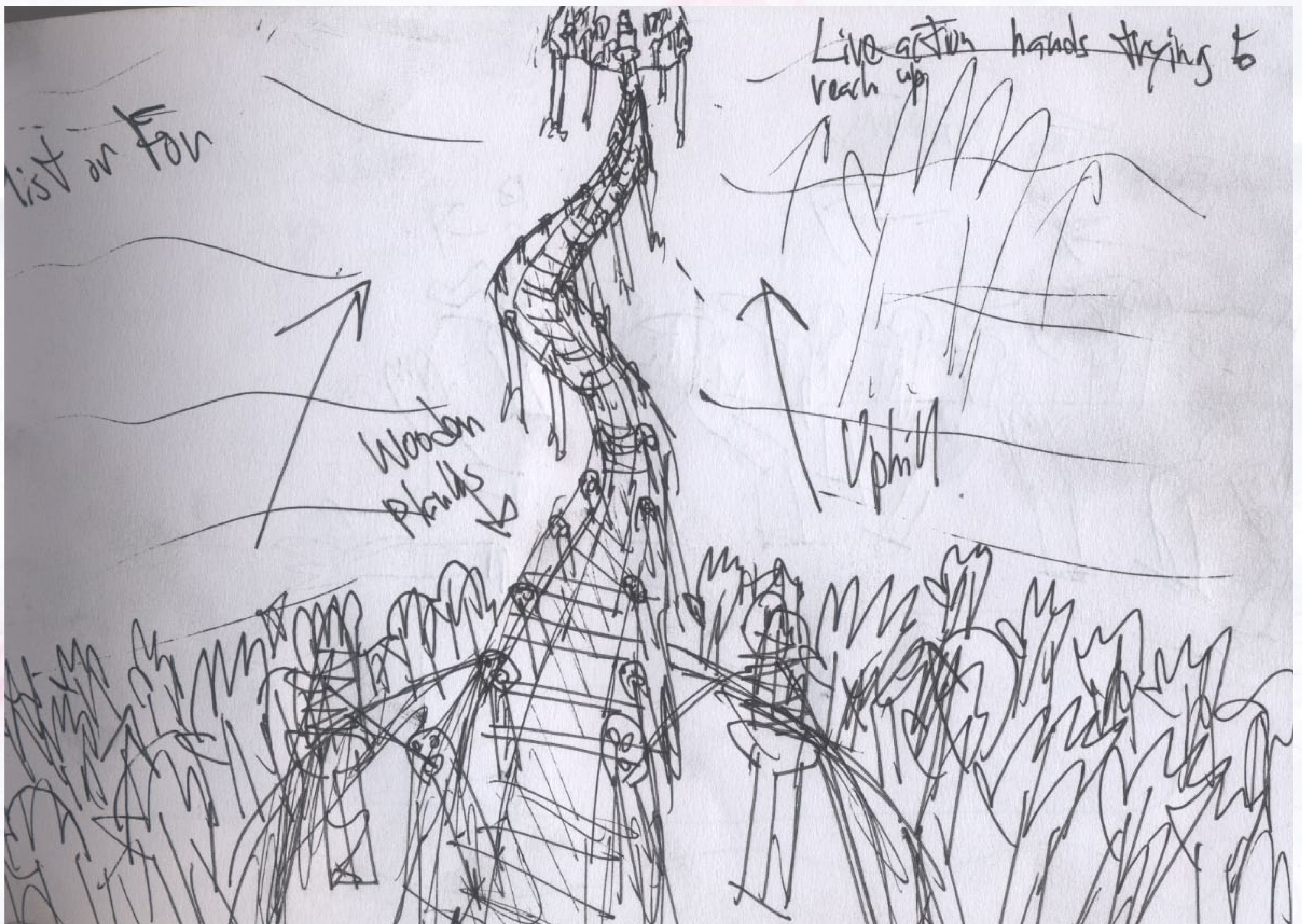
Concept: The first set seen in the film is probably the most esoteric because it doesn't exist in the "real world" of the film. It's the other world, the spirit world. An unseen dimension, from whence our Puppet Masters reside. The "Things" that pull our strings reside here. My original concept was based on a Noh Stage and the design of a Shamisen. In a traditional Noh theater there is a Backstage, a Stage and a Bridge between the two. If you read the Making Of chapter you can learn more about the concepts behind the Noh theater setup. If you look at my concept art, you can see that when viewed from above the set resembles a shamisen. Since the film's theme is based on Marionettes and this is the place from whence the Marionette Controllers originate, there should be a lot hands in this place. so you have the mysterious hands that tug on the invisible strings. There is also a Stage here. A Stage where various spirits audition for their final performance, their chance to return to the world of the living for revenge or whatever else the Y soul may be yearning to do. There is a metronome here as well. Our internal rhythms are being set from elsewhere, from a realm we cannot perceive with our eyes and ears. Instead we feel this rhythm from the (aforementioned) metronome in the

Nether World, that everything in the world of HSM syncs to. So this Stage in the Nether World is a place where lost souls reside, waiting for a chance to go across the bridge, back into the world of the living. The Nether World is a very lonely and mysterious place.

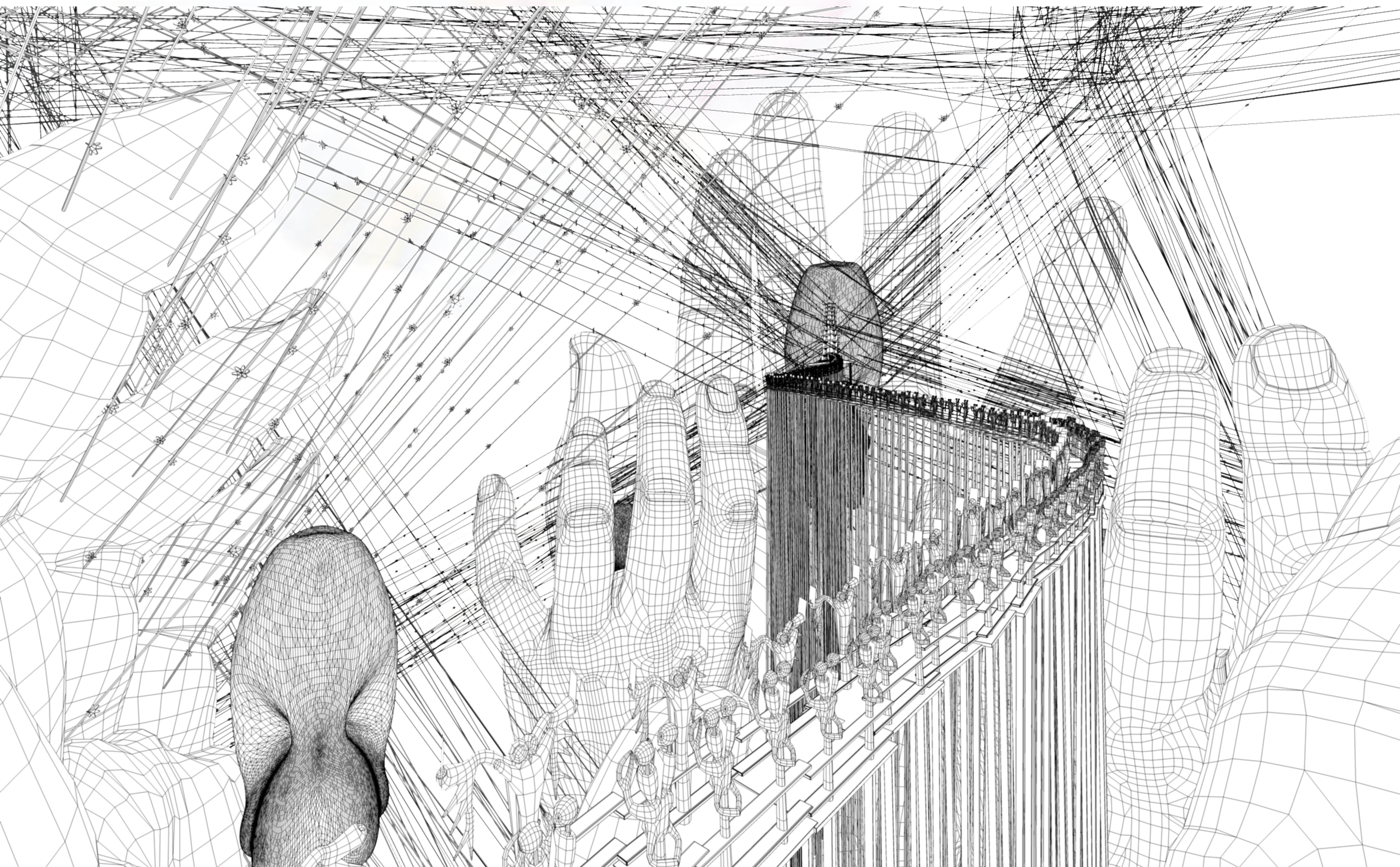
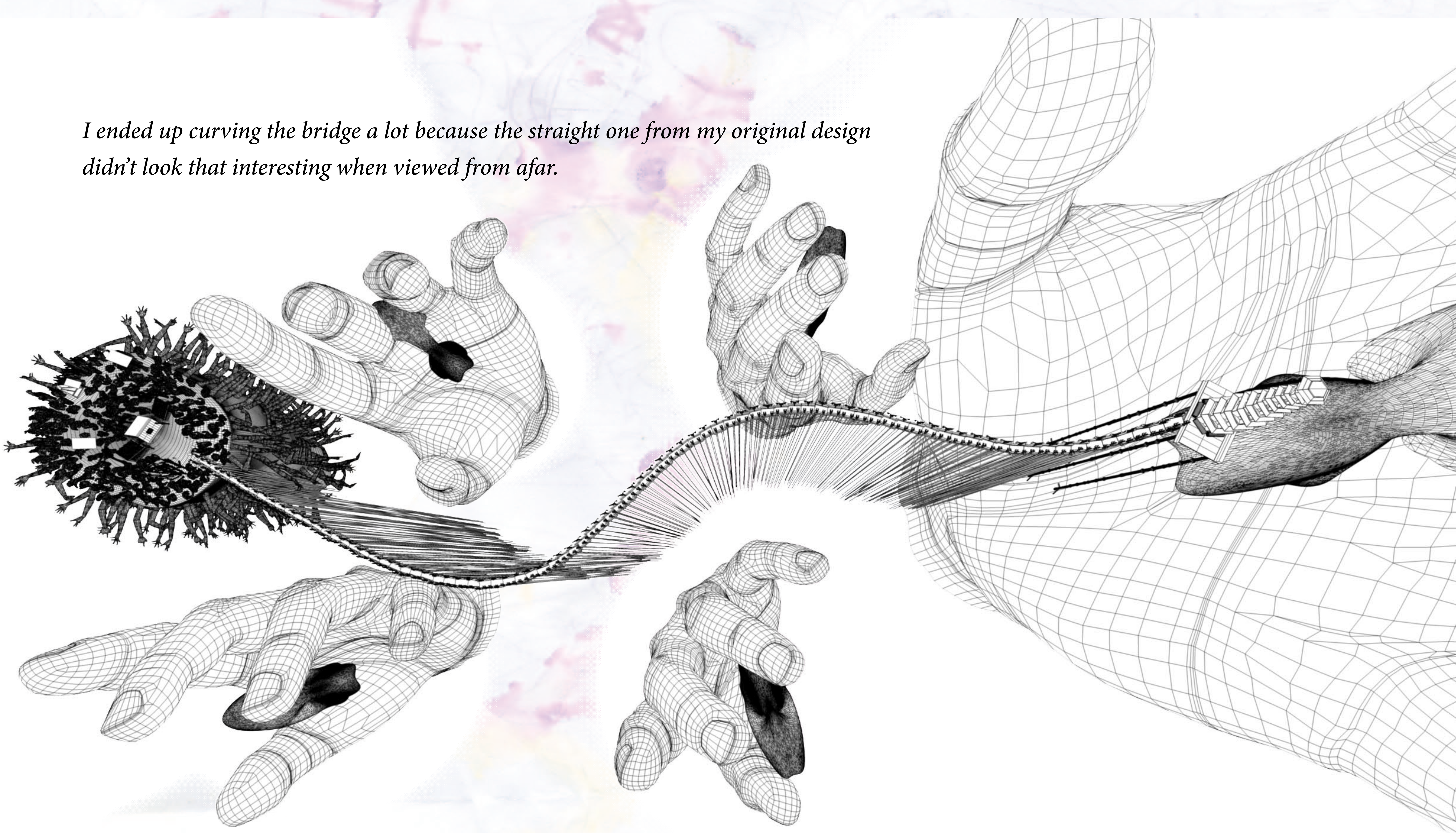
Technical: I was pretty nervous as this was the first set I constructed and whenever I make the "first thing", it almost had the weight of the whole film on it, or that's usually how I perceive it. Like if it's not the most amazing thing ever, then I feel like a failure, as if the film is going to suck?! I take a lot of pride in my set design/lighting, so I put a lot of pressure on myself to come up with ill designs. On paper this came together pretty fast. I wanted to mimic a traditional Noh theater setup on a huge scale, whilst also making the set resemble a shamisen for some reason. The land masses in this set were sculpted in Zbrush and tweaked/textured in C4d. The set creation was straight forward, as the beauty of the set is in the design. Not because its super complex/detailed. I've always been a fan of minimalist Japanese aesthetics, so I did my best to do my minimalist thang. As part of my research I got some books on Japanese garden design, because they have some interesting techniques that directly apply to set design. Interestingly enough many of these concepts were used in early video game design in games like "Super Mario Bros" and "The Legend of Zelda". I was turned onto these facts by Chaim Gingold's thesis "Miniature Gardens & Magic Crayons" which is available online. I manually "painted" the hand geometry onto the landscape, using the Paint on Surface plugin. The background painted onto The Stage was painted by Norwegian artist Ini, per my instruction, with the traditional pine tree paintings used on Noh stages as reference. I created the bridge with the Mograph module in C4d which makes fast work of repetitive structures. All I did was model one segment of the bridge then I cloned the segment along a spline using Mograph. Originally I was using high poly doll heads as part of the bridge design but when I made the 200-300 clones required it grinded my PC to a halt, so then I made a low poly proxy version using a normal map to add in detail and that worked great. I only used the high poly pieces in the immediate foreground when needed. In the end I really liked the way this came out and its render times are reasonable.

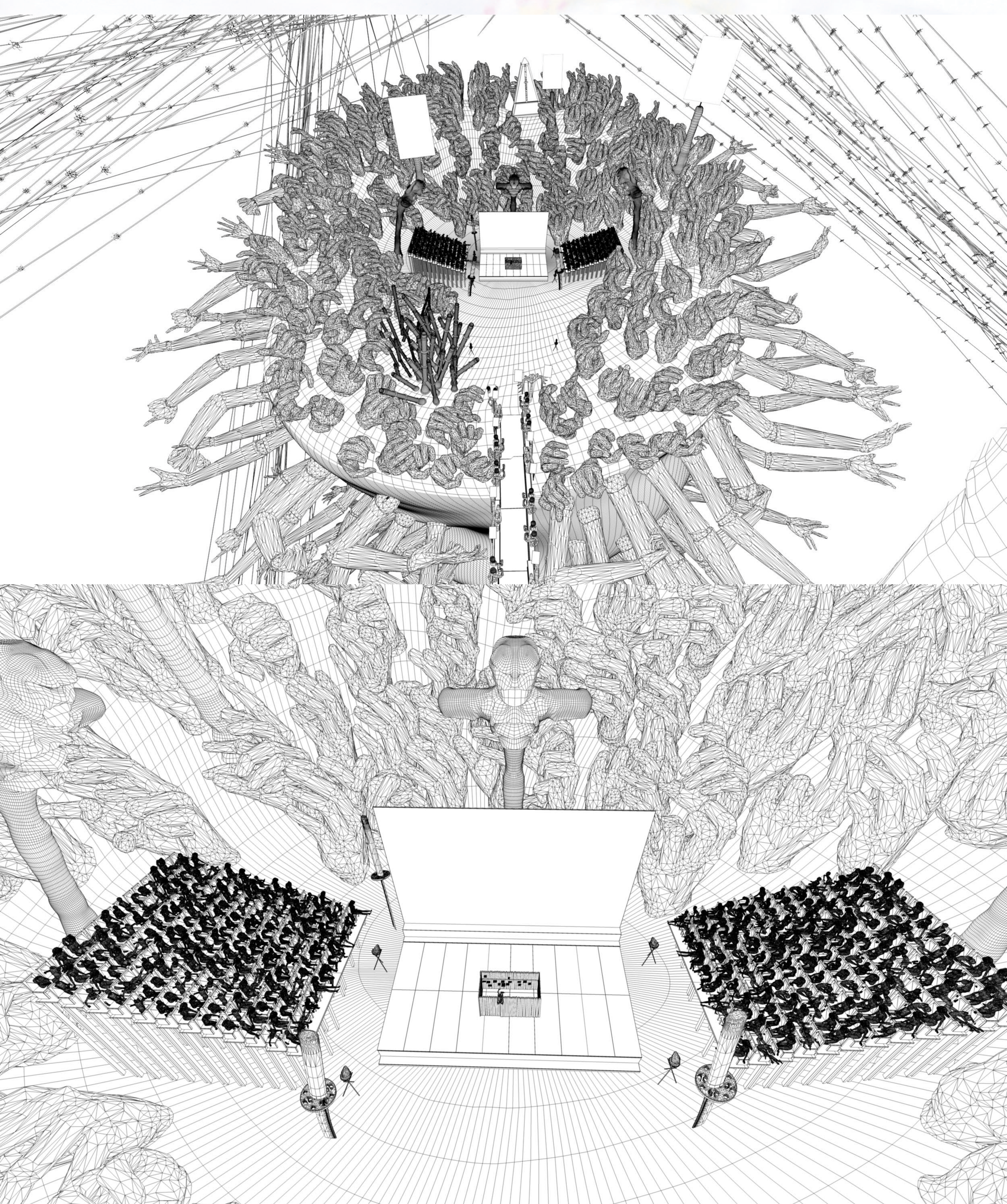


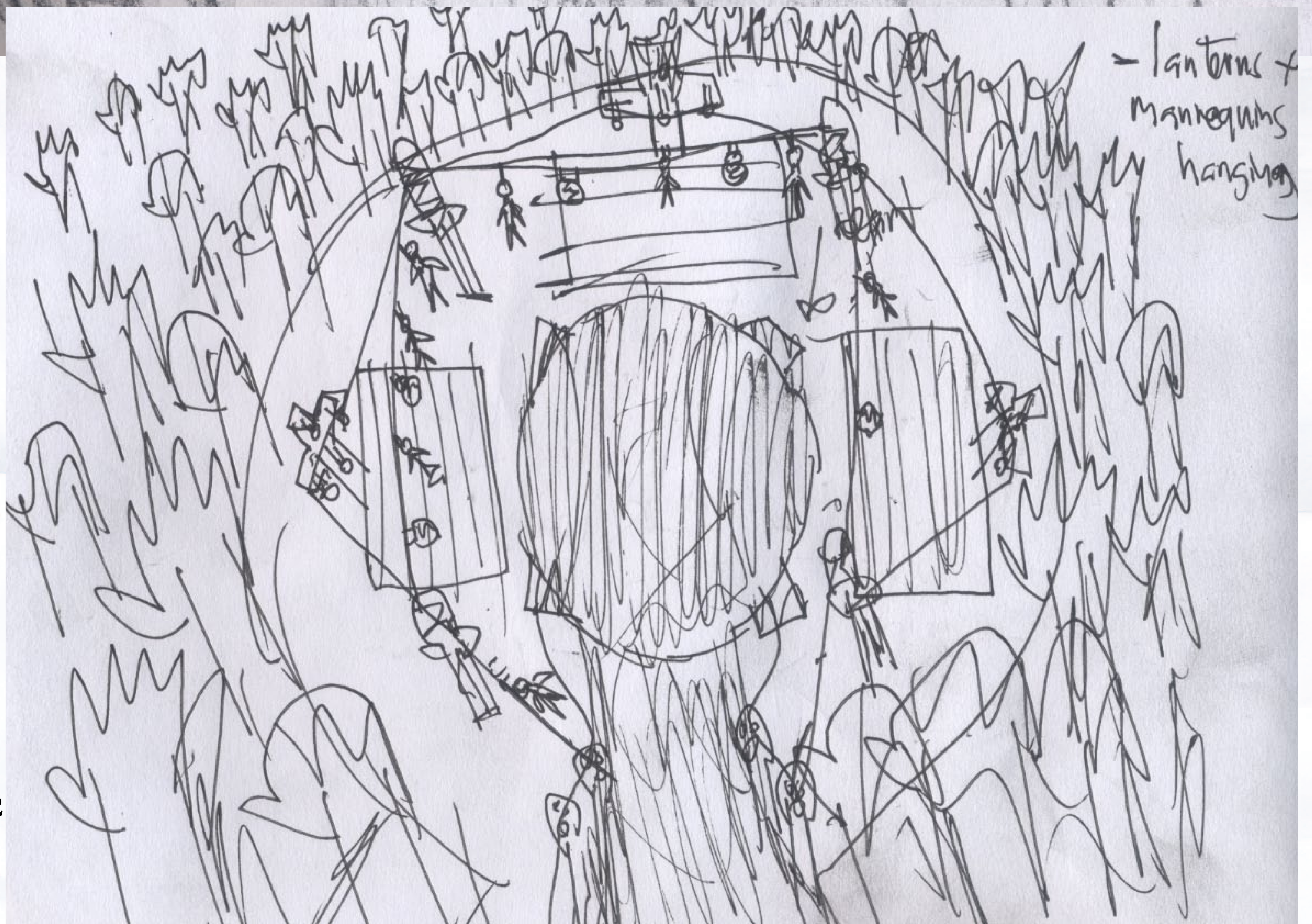
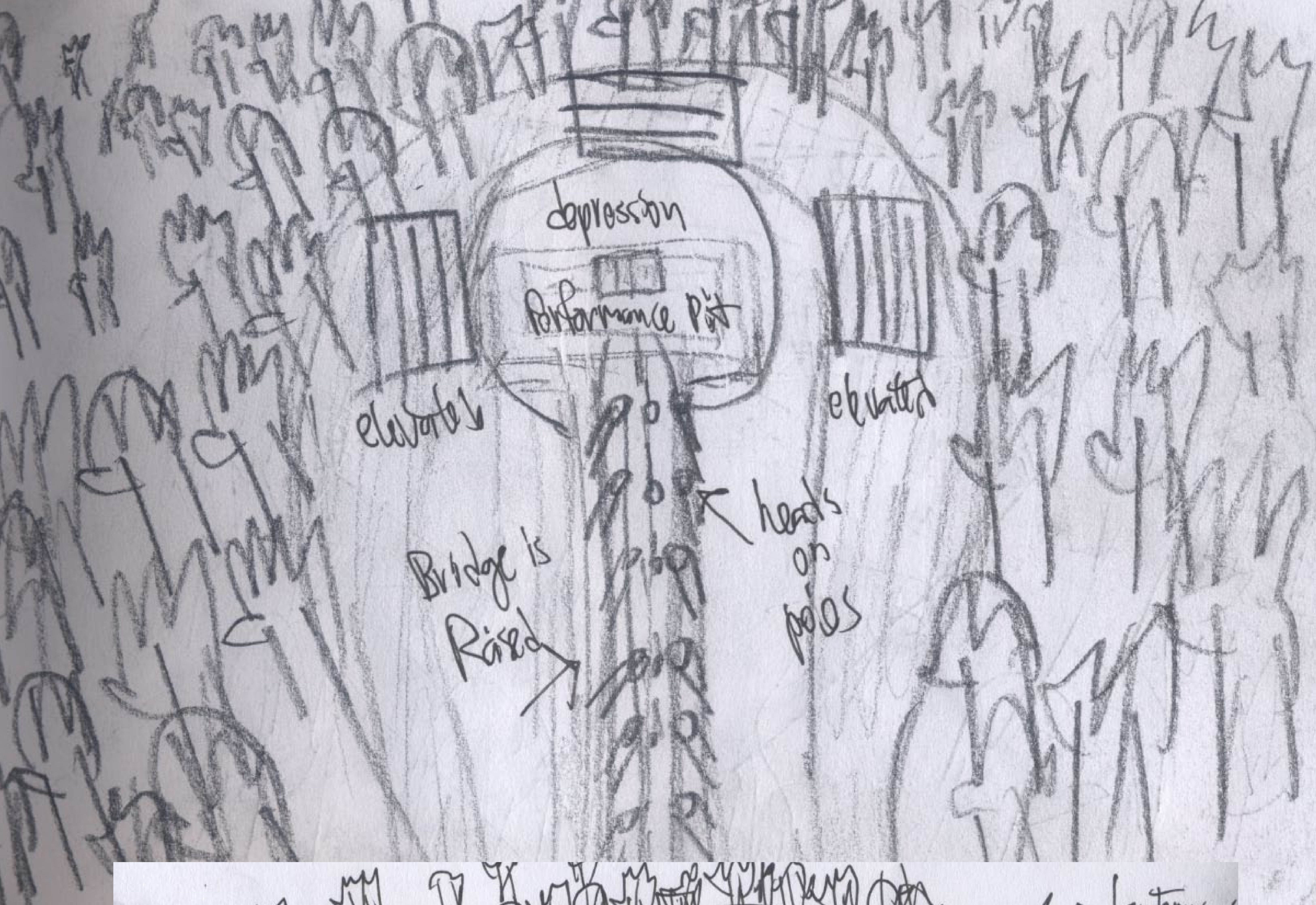
My original “shamisen viewed from above” design

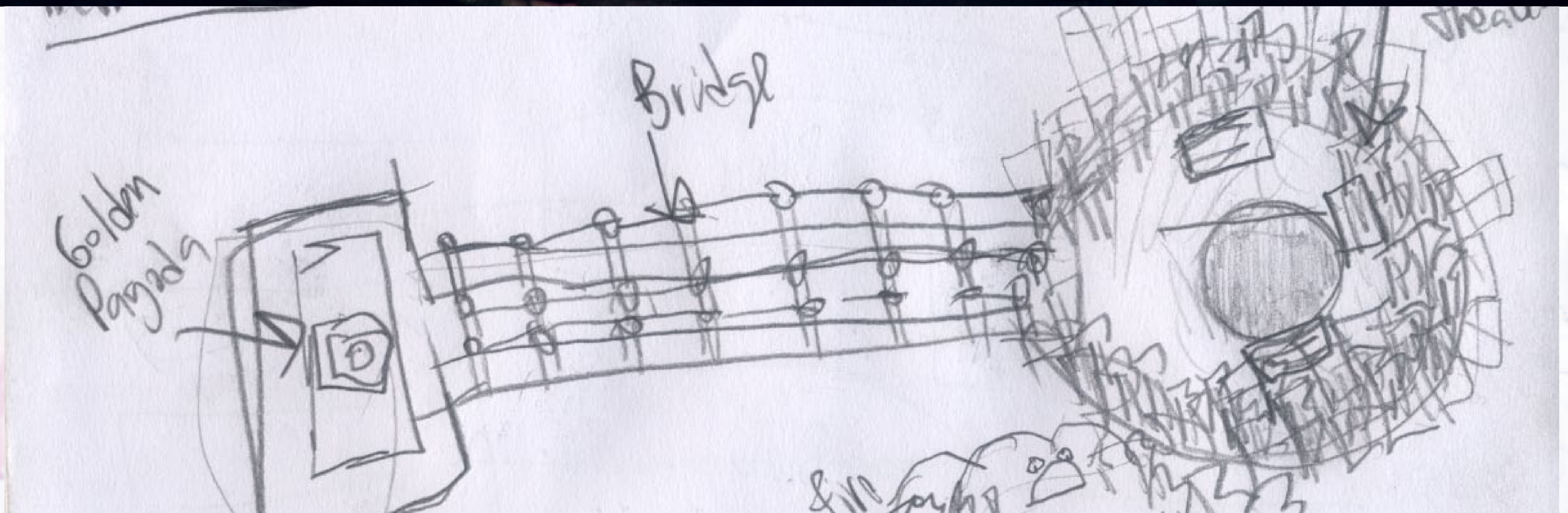


I ended up curving the bridge a lot because the straight one from my original design didn't look that interesting when viewed from afar.









Another early “shamisen viewed from above” design... the concept was more interesting than how it actually looked after being modelled



WOR MANOR

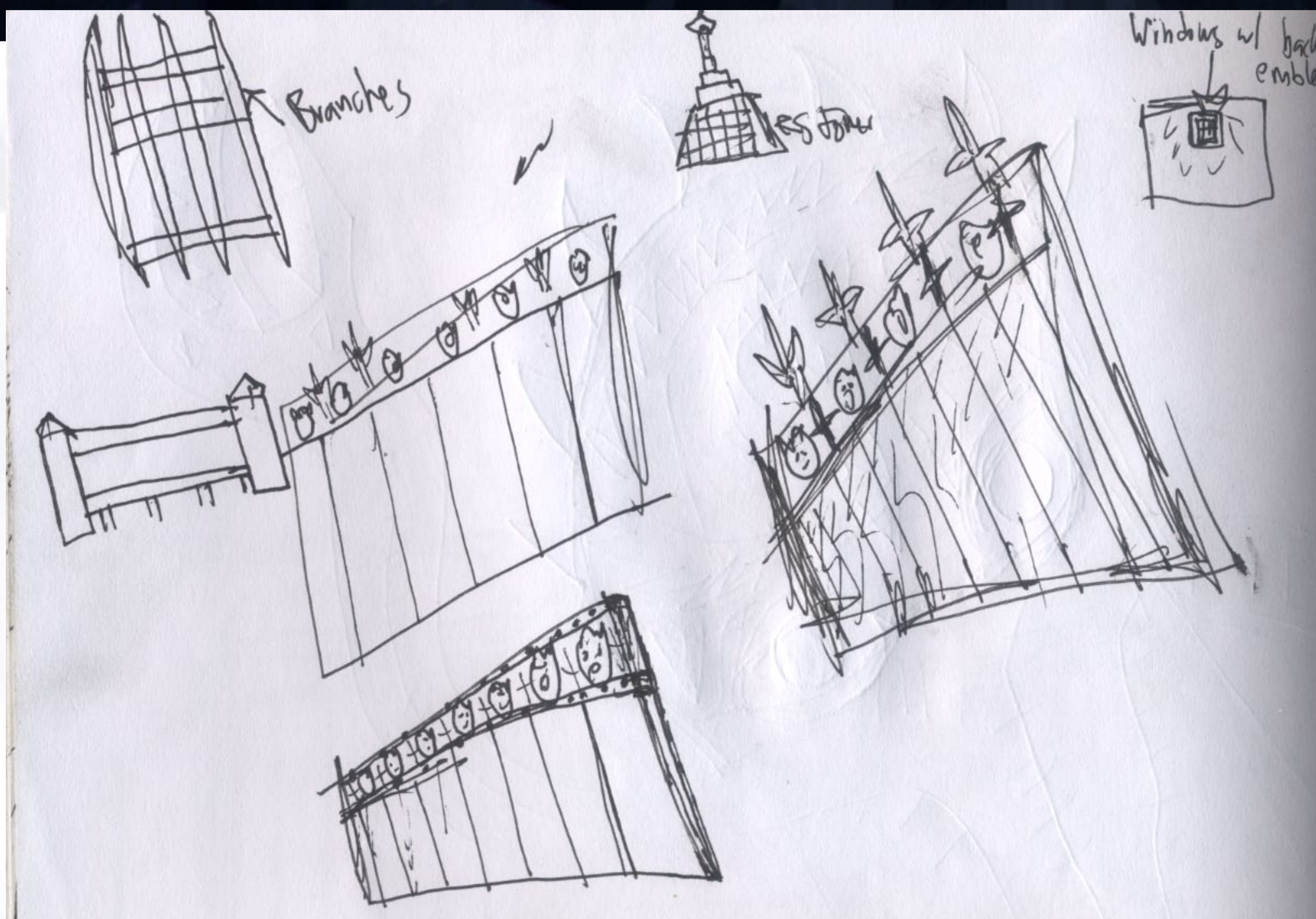
Concept: This is the bad guy's base. My concept was a very dark, dusty, creepy old place. I based its look on a lot of the sets seen in the "Nemuri Kyoshiro" series of films and the sets in games from "Fatal Frame" series. I also thought that it would add another layer of weirdness if I made the set look like something I would/could build if I had to make it as a real set for a stopmotion film, so I used a plywood texture for the wooden walls. I've never seen a mansion in a Samurai film with plywood walls, have you? ^ ^ So this set needed to be a dark and creepy place, where a bunch of masked weirdos hang out. As such the design was very simple. I designed all of these sets by laying out from above much like an architect would, I guess? I wanted it to be very pattern based, with no organic design to reinforce the ways of the WOR clan. It was their way or no way. I also wanted it to reflect the dictator behind this creepy Puppet Regime. Like most egotistic madmen, Lord Wor has adorned his mansion with various busts and statues of himself.

Technical: This was a pretty fun and easy set to create since it was so simple. It's just like an octagon with smaller octagons inside of it to form the inner rooms.

When I drew the crappy blueprint for it, I also drew in where all the beams would be because I didn't want them getting in the way of where the camera would be, or blocking any of the action scenes. I could always move them if need be, but I really wanted them to all be in perfect order and very symmetrical in opposition to the chaos of the outside world of HSM. I used the Mo-graph module to create all the fences and roof pieces, with the fancy looking gold adornment sculpted in Zbrush applied to low res geometry through normal maps, or SPD maps for objects needed for close ups. I modeled the ridiculous, giant sculpture in front of Wor manor with Zsphere in Zbrush. All the lamps inside of Wor Manor were modeled from real reference I found via Google images. I had a lot of fun modeling all the lanterns and lamps for the film. I just collected all I could find on Google images, then went through and modeled all the ones I liked. That's kind of how I made everything for the film. When doing doors I would model all the doors for the whole film, then just pick and choose from my inventory when I was in the layout phase. There isn't anything special when it comes to this set, it was just the result of getting a lot of reference and adding my own little tweaks to the designs. This set also has a lot of torches. I made these stylized torches using formula deformers. I was able to get a much more realistic look, but decided to go for a look that was my own fire, which is much more stylized. I thought it was creepy because, with the fire I ended up using, in some of the still frames it looked like there were faces and stuff in the fire. Super creepy stuff = better than realism if you ask me!

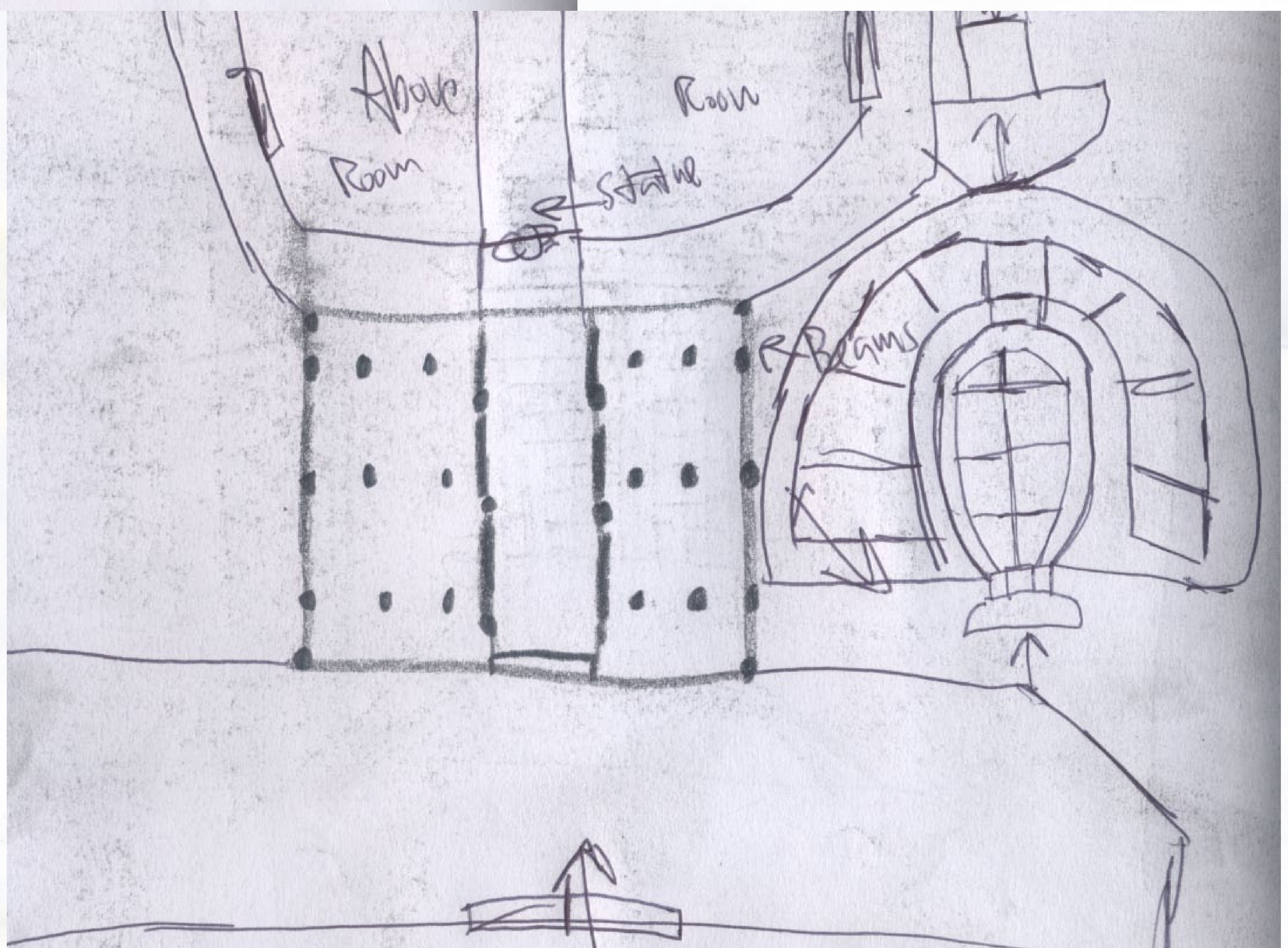


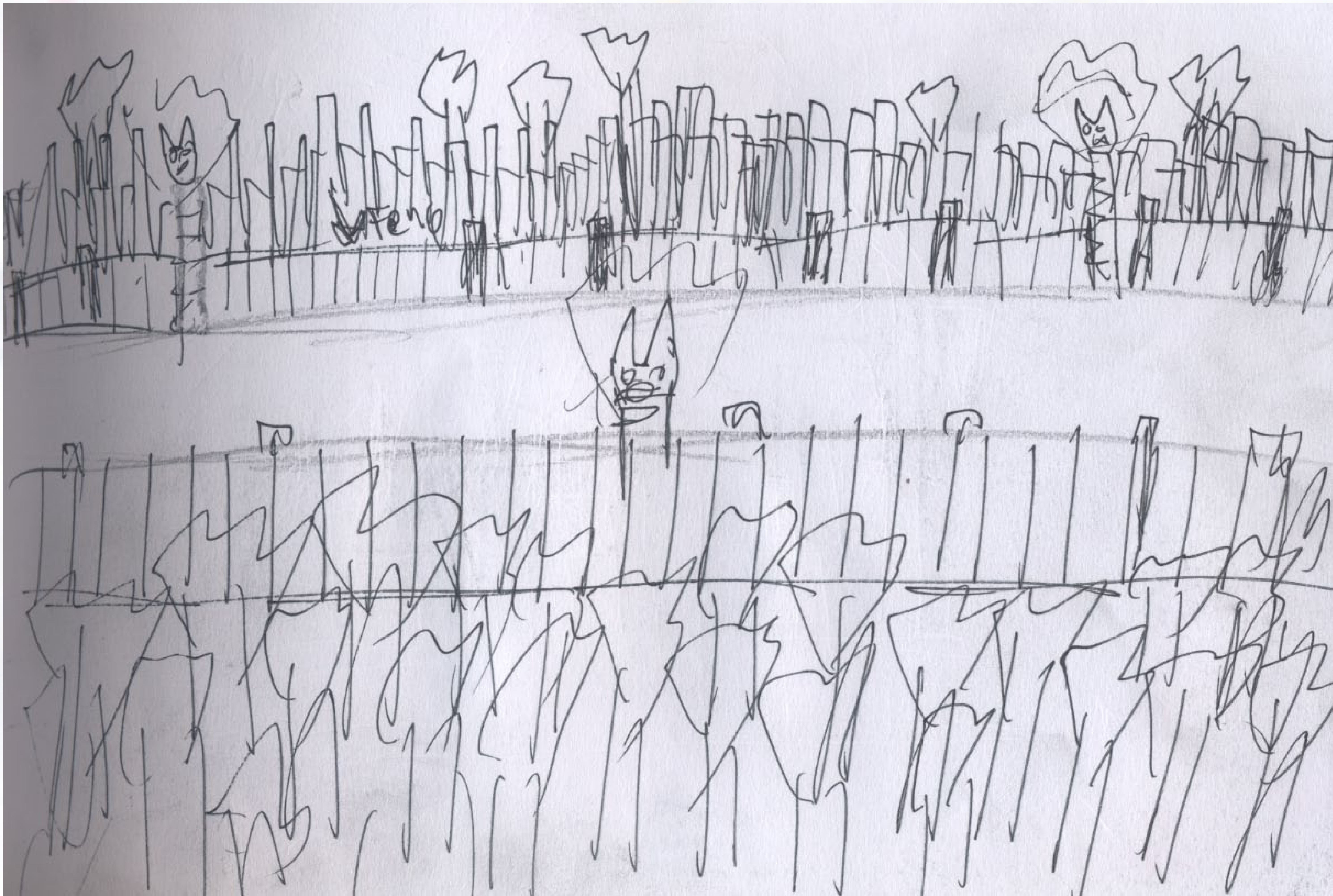




I knew I was going to use Cinema 4d's mo-graph cloners to assemble the design so I made everything in pieces so I could replicate them procedurally later.

Aren't I a HORRIBLE architect?!
Drawing the building from above helped me plan out the design and figure out where the beams needed to be.

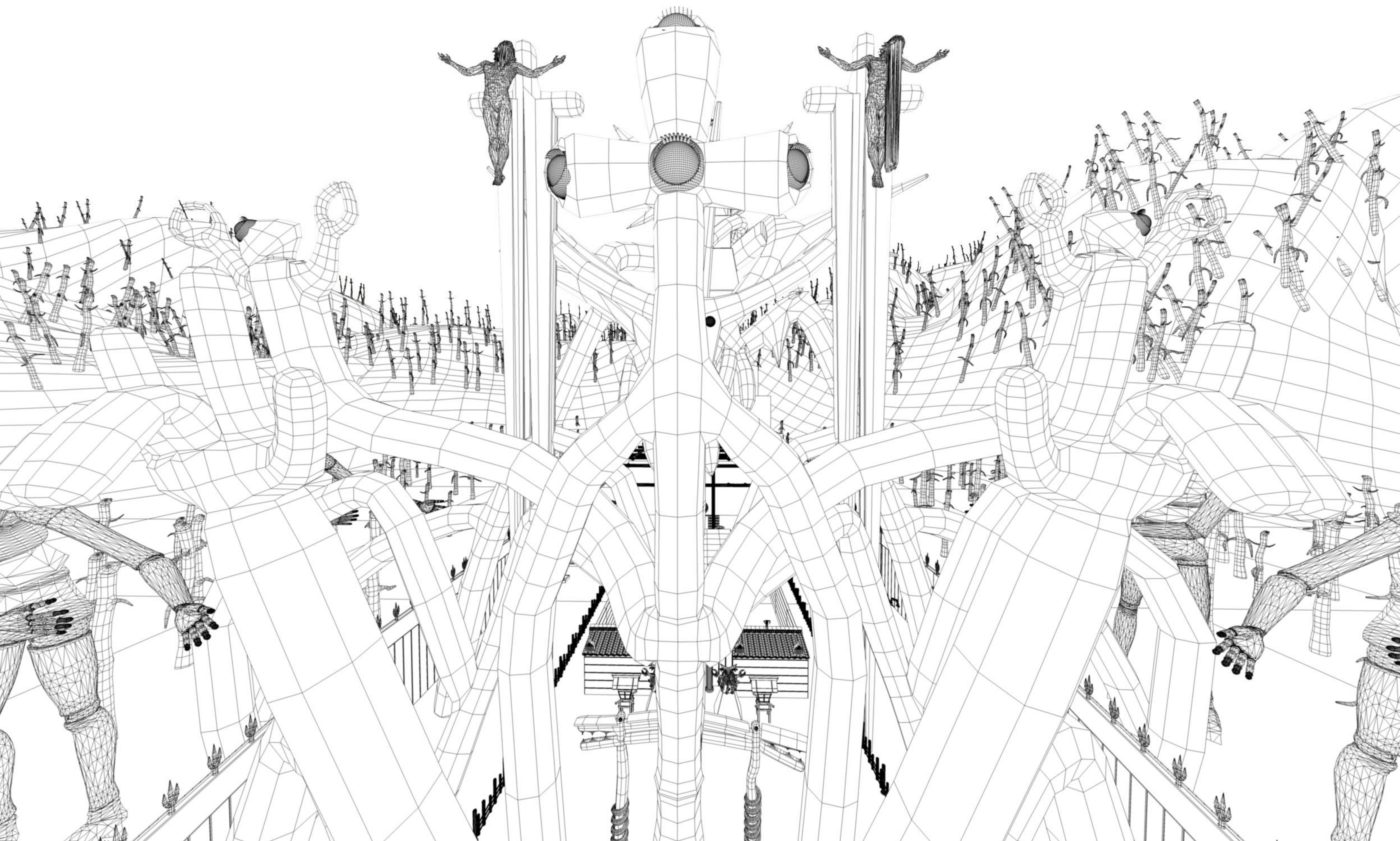
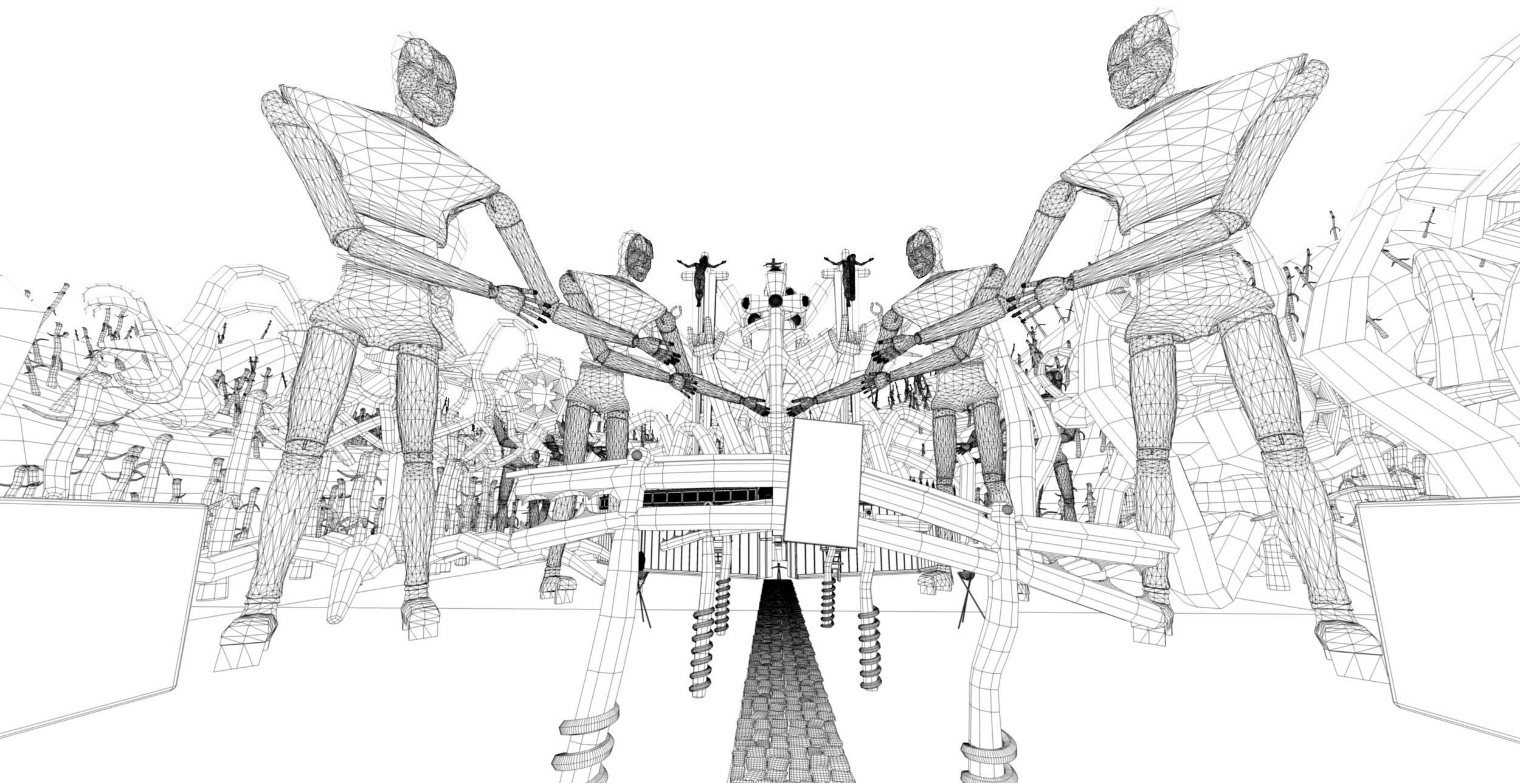


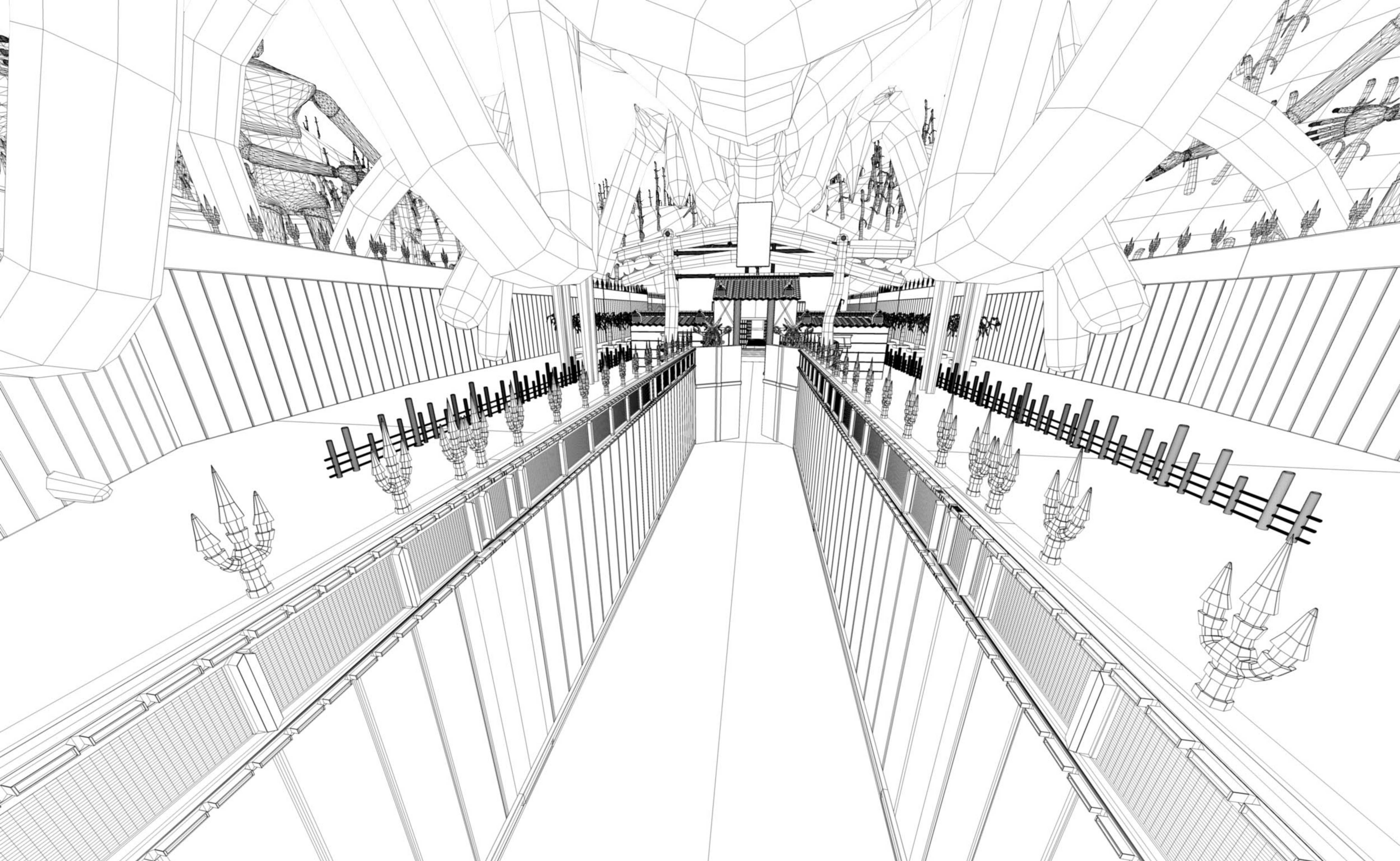
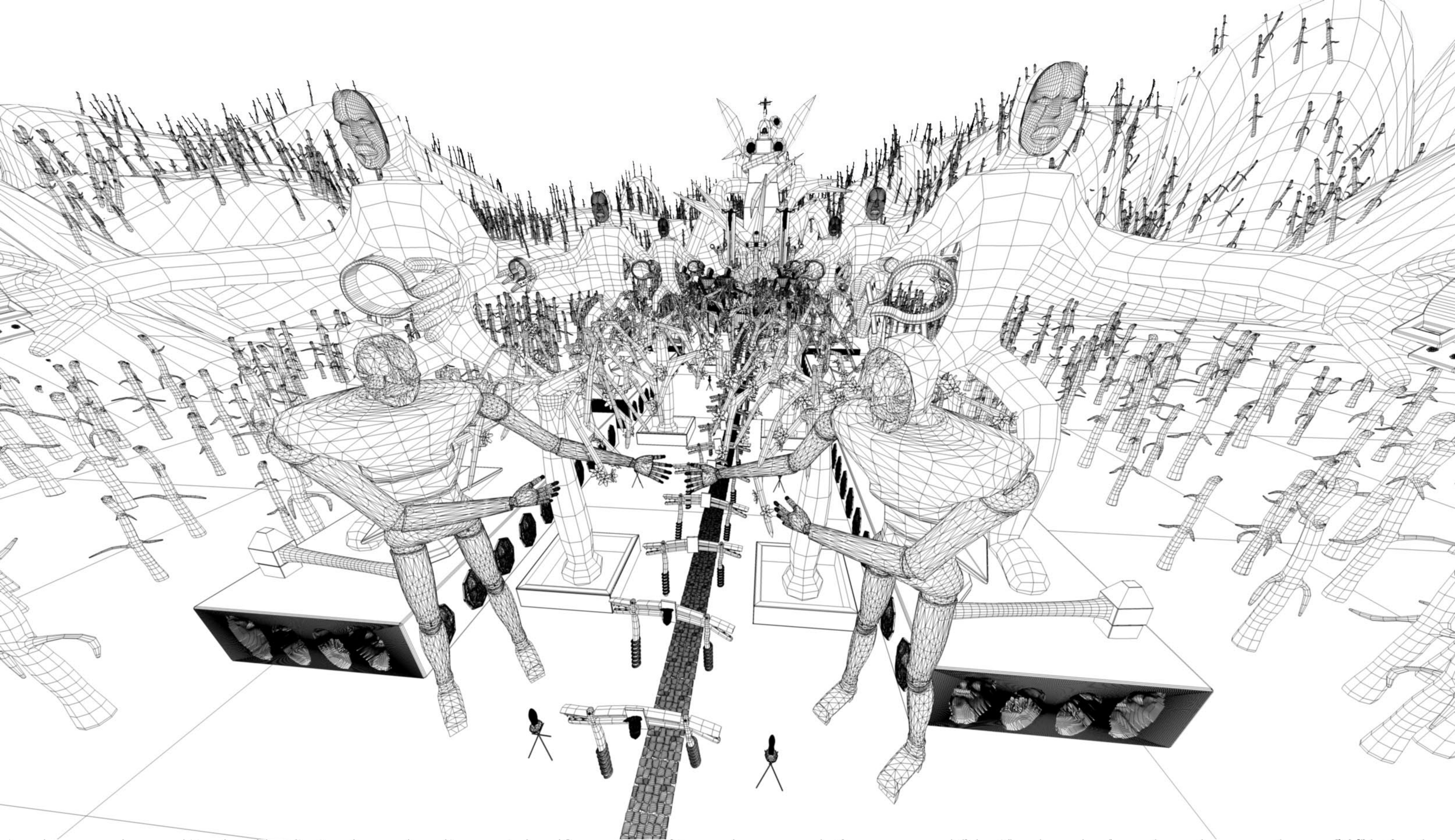


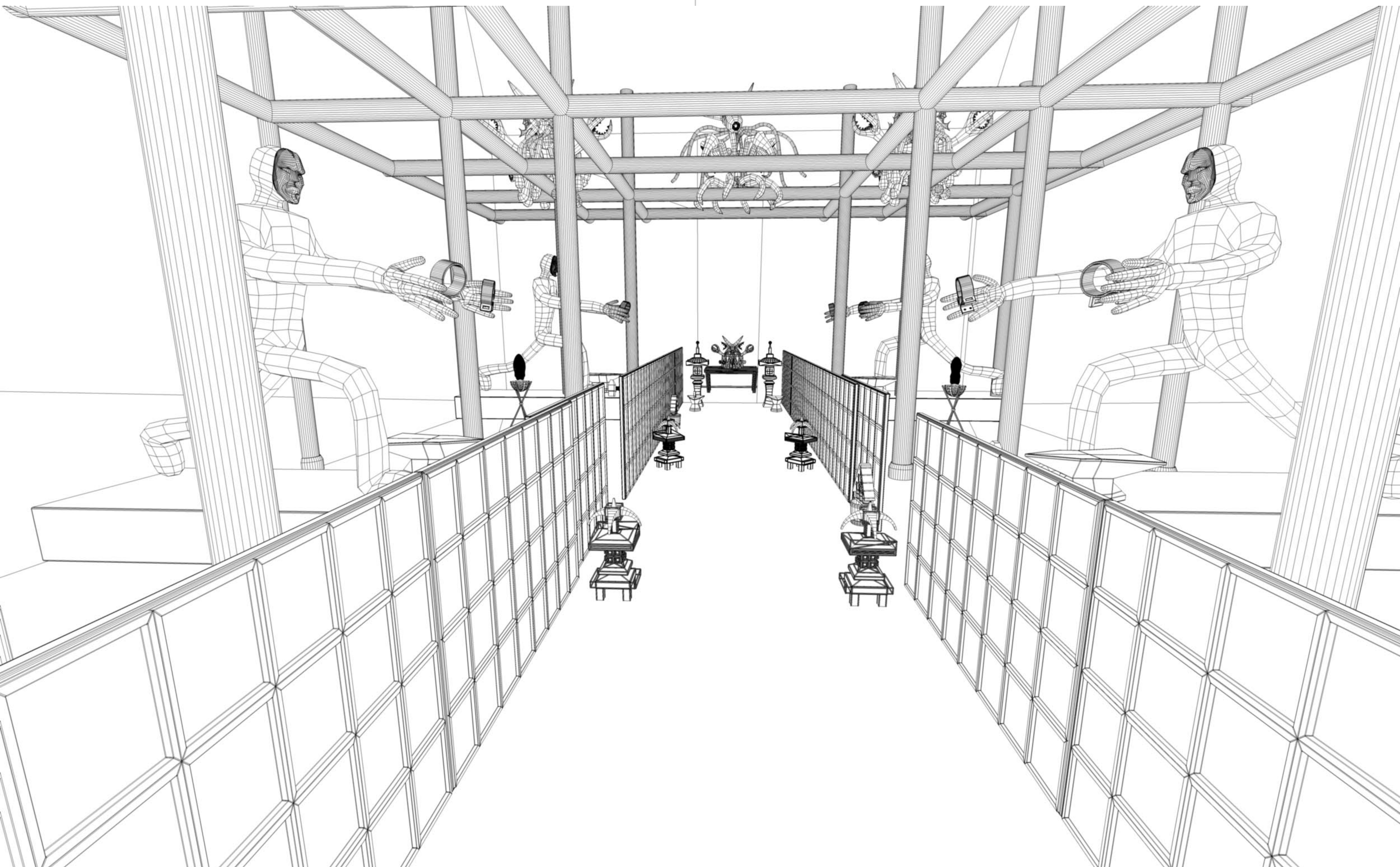
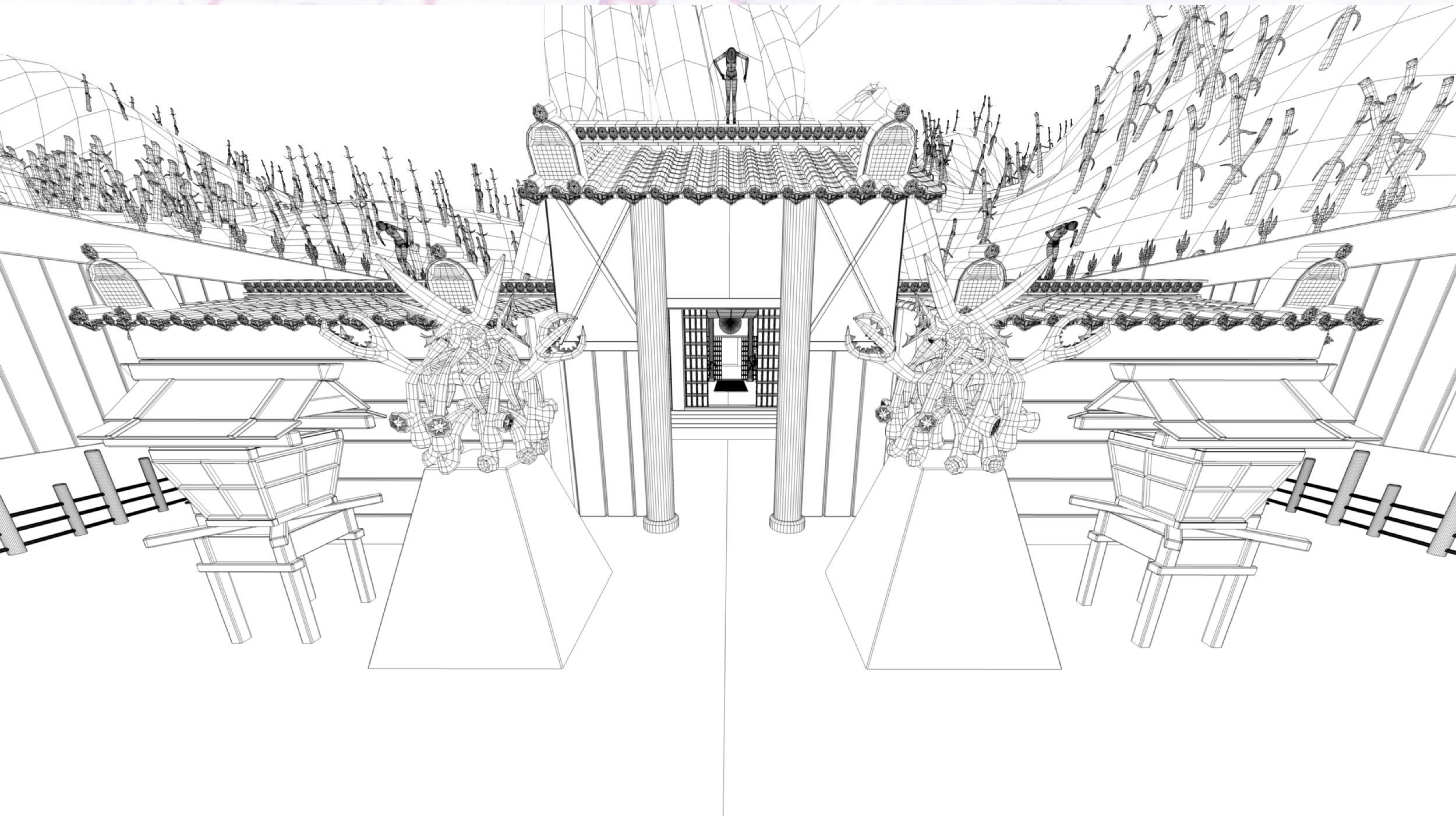
Original design for the fence with Oni head torches

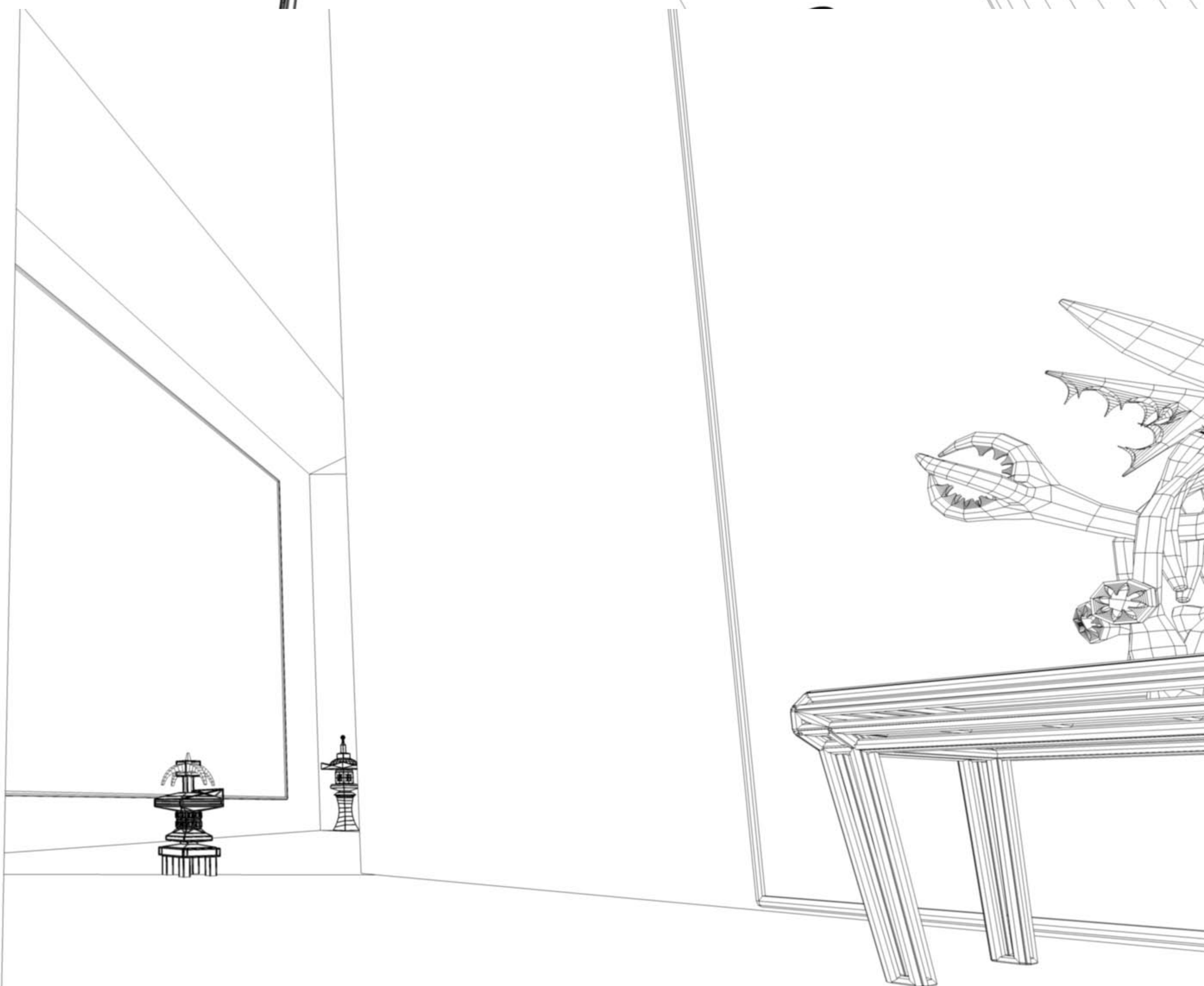
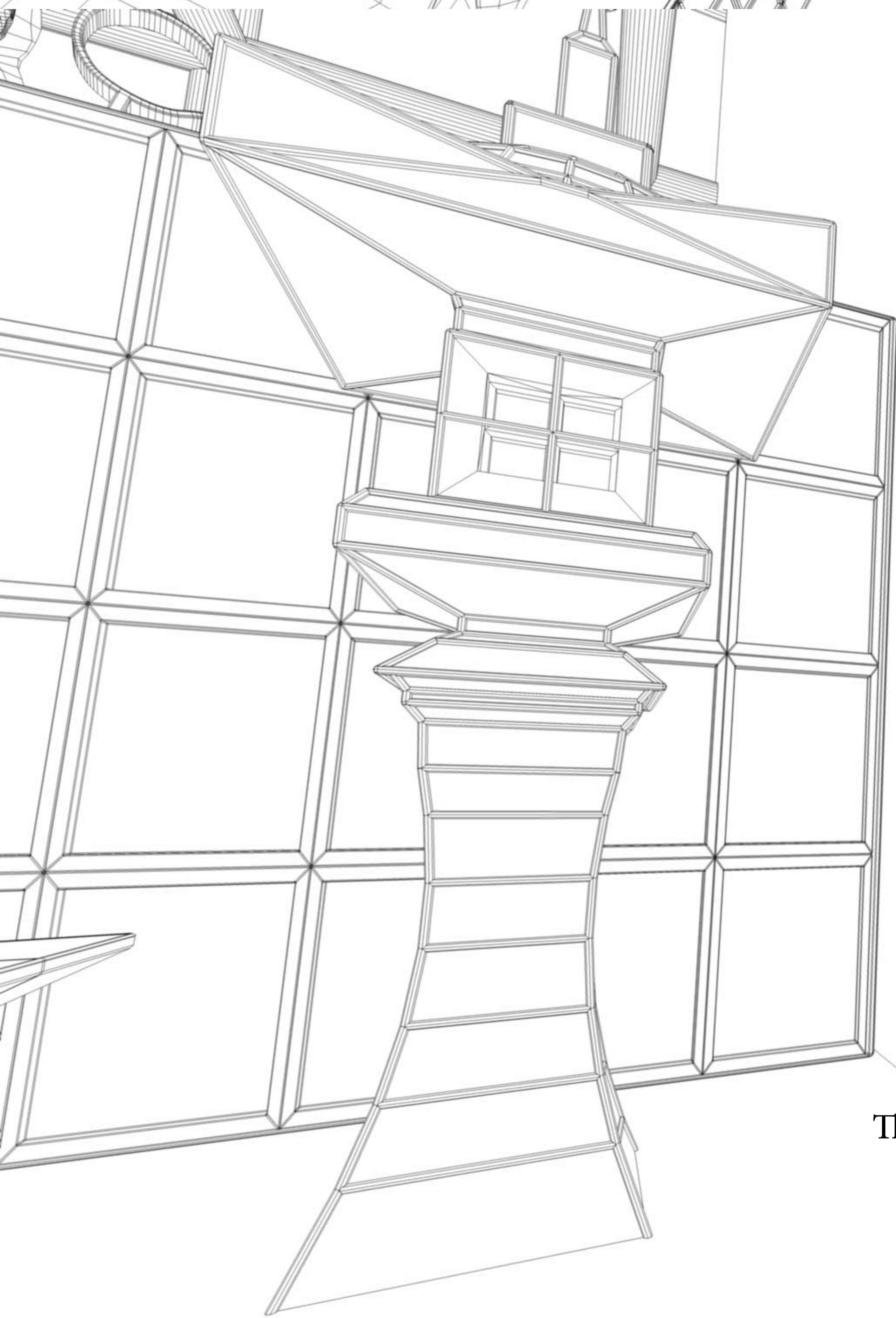
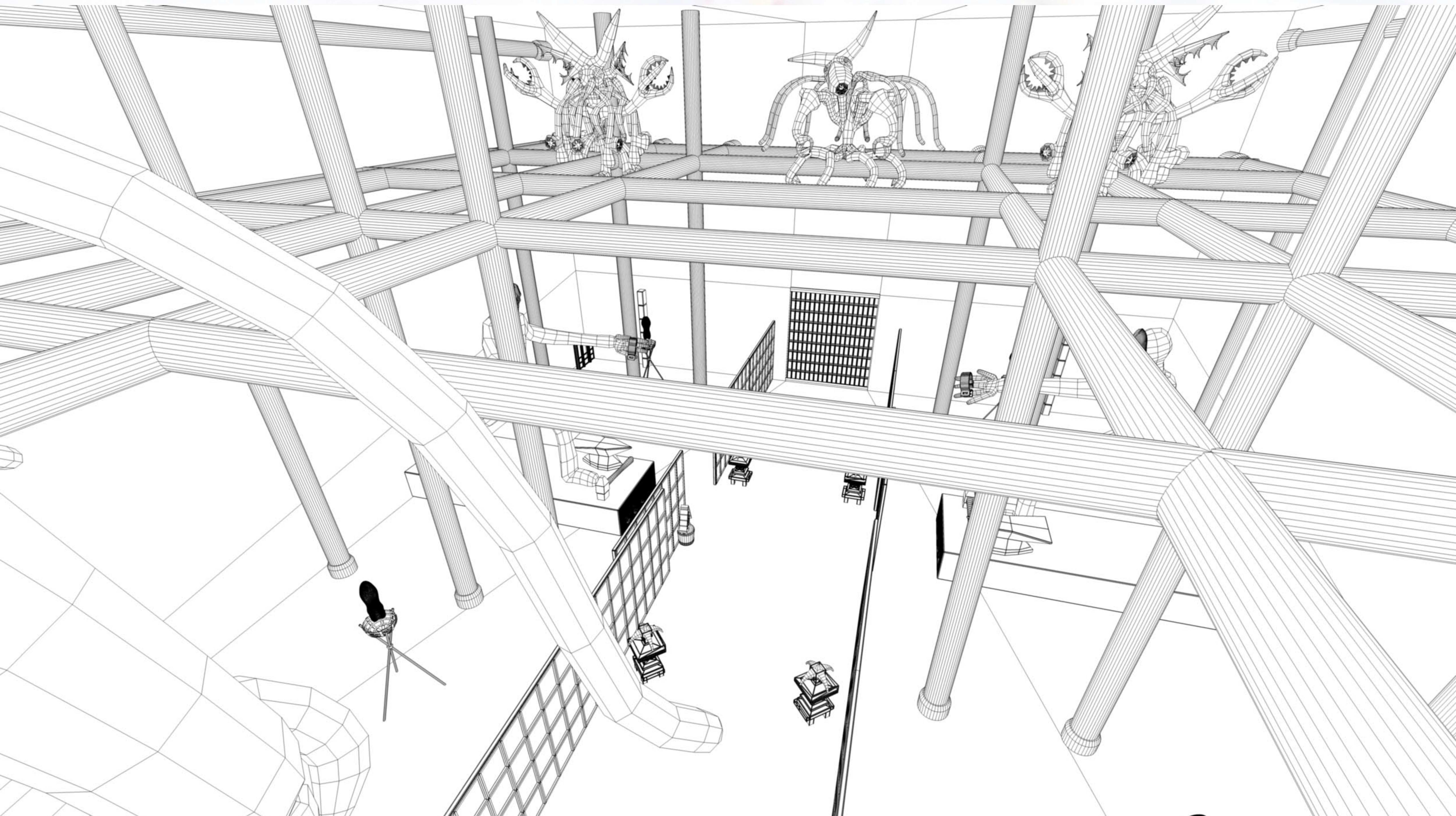


I ended up just using a normal spiky fence as I decided to save the more ornate designs for another part of this set







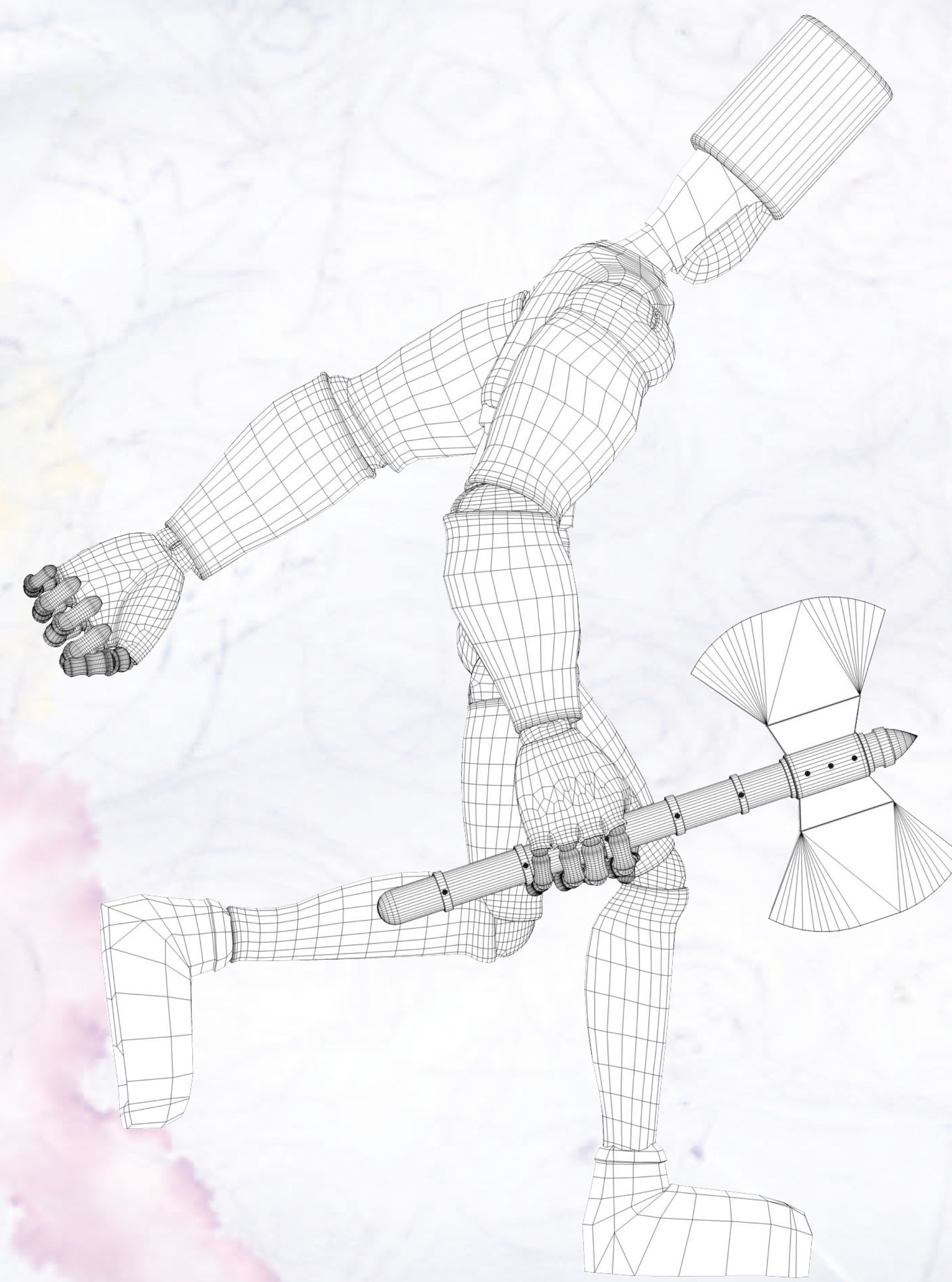


The complexity of the interior is all textures so the geometry is very simple

MOUNTAIN PASS

Concept: I wanted this to be a really creepy place where BAD THINGS HAPPEN. I wanted this to be my great buddha pass where Ryonosuke Tsuke killed people in “Sword of Doom”, except it would be Cerealis killing people instead. So conceptually these mountain passes linked the villages together in the world of HSM, so you had to pass through this area to get anywhere new. Much like the troll under the bridge, a horrible monster would lurk here preying on those who dare to pass through AT NIGHT. Luckily there is no daytime in the world of HSM, so horrible things always happen when anyone tries to go through here. I wanted a dark foggy place where you aren’t able to see very far into the distance. I still remember the horror of playing “Silent Hill 1” the first time, without knowing anything about it. When those creepy little things started coming out of the fog. I’m a big fan of fog, it’s just too bad that it’s so difficult to reproduce realistically in 3d, whilst keeping render times sane. So the mountain pass is a place no one really wants to be in, since its so creepy and filled with death.

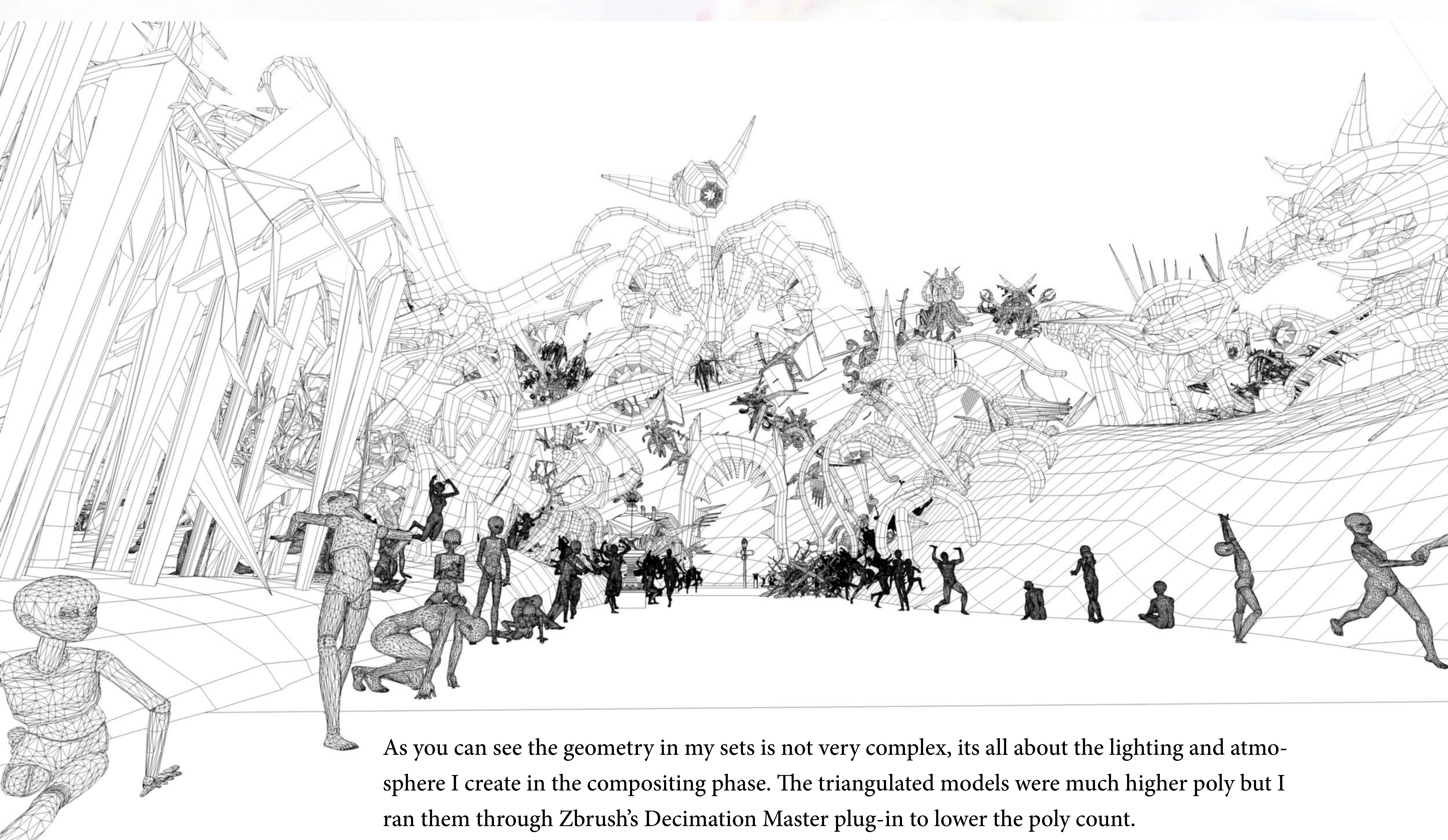
Technical: I had created a bunch of mountains ahead of time for use in the whole film. I started with C4d’s built in landscape objects, then used the magnet and brush tools to modify them. Then I just applied a paper maché texture that I created on the mountains. I used the Surface Spread plugin to add all the trees on the mountains. To give things a dead look, whilst not being too barren, I added enough trees to increase the level of complexity, to satisfy my tweaker eye, but not so many that it took away from the lonely, dead vibe. This set also includes a lot of Mannequins. I added these models by painting them on the landscape with the Paint on Surface plugin. There are a few flags on this set as well that are just made from polygonal planes with a mixture of wind and formula deformers. I tried to stay away from real cloth sims whenever possible, as the workflow is a little to slow and rigid for my liking. For the fire burning in the middle of the set, I went for a very stylized look after experimenting with a few realistic looks. I tested comping in practical fire but the style just didn’t match, so I turned to Mograph again and ended up just animating a cloner’s offset as the objects followed some splines, with formula deformers animating the splines. I had real trouble with the color/lighting set which wasn’t resolved until the compositing phase, wherein I took most all the color out of the 3d renders and added color back in with secondary color cor-



rection, using feathered colored solids in add mode. It was a lot of work but it ended up giving it a really nice, painterly look. The color problem stemmed from the fact that there was yellow, red and blue light mixing in this set, which caused this greenish tint on many things. I also didn’t use strong enough key lights, so after cranking the contrast and crushing the blacks, the focal point of the shots got lost in a mushy, muddy background. So I used masks to isolate/relight the set. There were also problems, because in many of the shots the skies were lit much brighter than the actual sets, so in the compositing phase I had to use gradients to drop the exposure of the skies. All the fog in this set was added in the compositing phase. I had tested a few fog techniques in 3d for this set, but none of them looked any good so I gave up and abandoned it. However, just for fun, when I got to the comp phase, I experimented with adding the fog back in and it actually looked great! To create the fog I took a single practical fog element and created a big time offset grid of the element in After Effects, using Trapcode Particular. I rotated the elements so they receded in Zspace, so that when animated it looked like fog rolling across the ground. I then rendered this out at a png sequence and used the C4d camera/light export to lock this fog grid to the camera in 3d space. I was surprised at how good it came out!







As you can see the geometry in my sets is not very complex, its all about the lighting and atmosphere I create in the compositing phase. The triangulated models were much higher poly but I ran them through Zbrush's Decimation Master plug-in to lower the poly count.



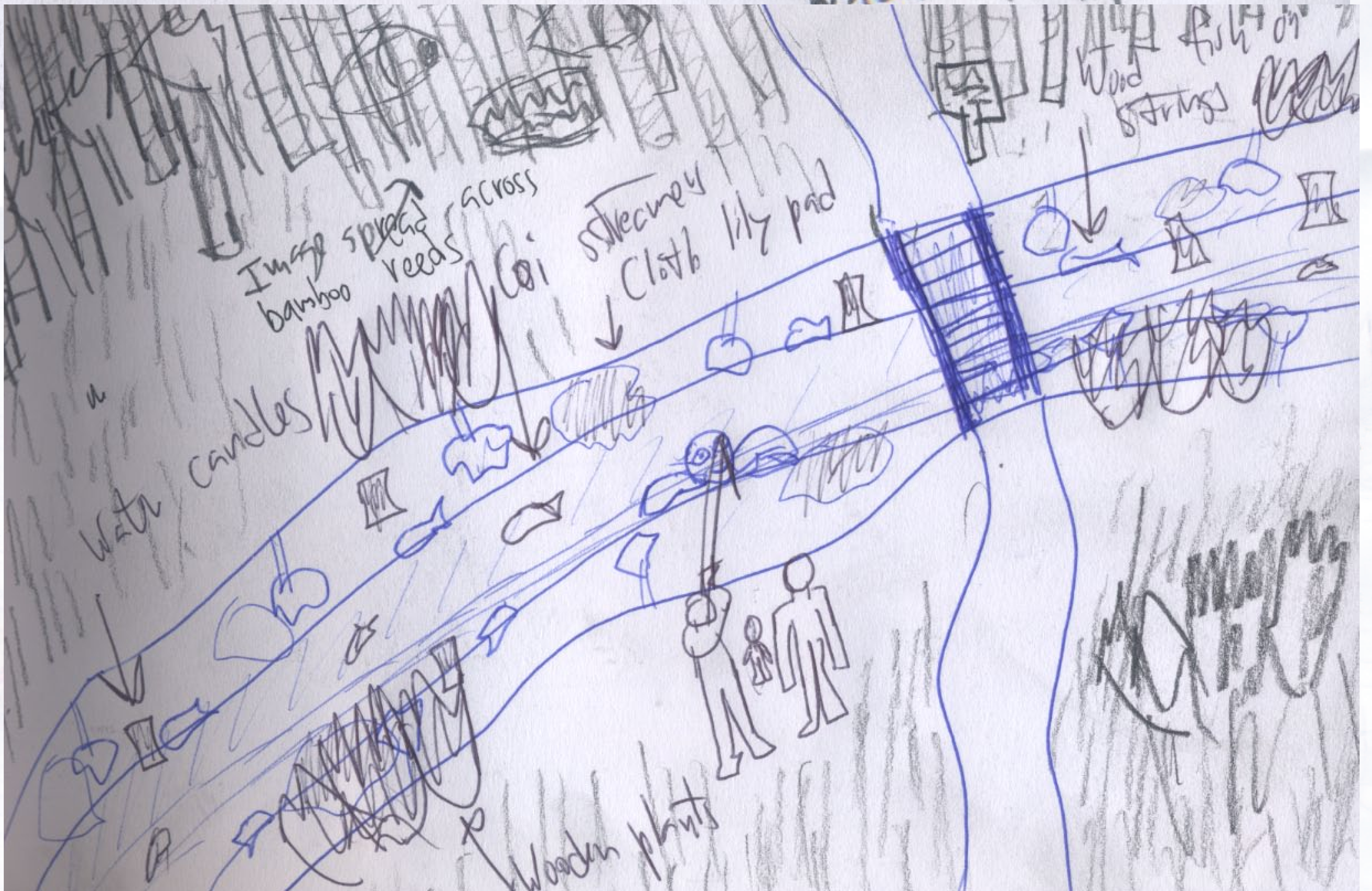
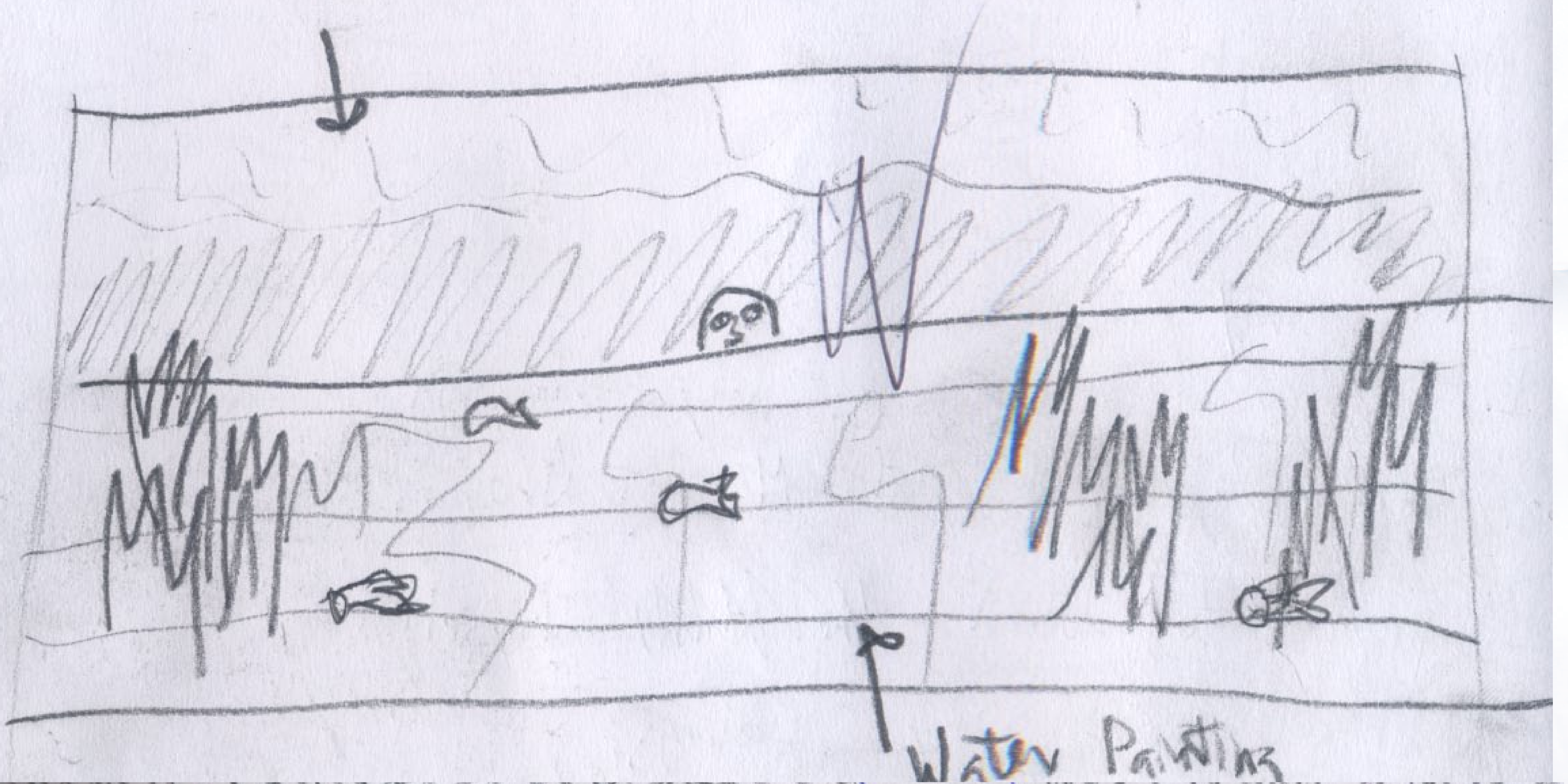
THE RIVER

Concept: I wanted this set to be a place of sentimental horror. I wanted it to be a place where perhaps wayward children would come to fish, without knowing that a horrible Monster, that fed on children, lurked in the river! So again my challenge to myself was to create a set that was both beautiful and creepy at the same time. Strangely enough my River has no water in it. Much like the strings in the film, the water is also invisible, not unlike the water of life. The whole waterless river just grew out of the Marionette show world concept. I wanted the world of HSM to look like a giant Marionette set, something from a past age. I'm sure today you could find a way to pump real water through a little set but I wanted to stay true to my crude hands on design concept. I'm more into allusions than direct associations because that's where the art is, that's where the magick is. I also have retained a bit of my childlike imagination, so it was enough of a River to convince me. When kids are watching a good puppet show and they get into it, the strings don't exist. They don't see the strings, they only see the characters living their lives. I mean at its base everyone knows that the film they are watching is not "real", so my approach is this: why waste your time doing all these little things to try to convince the audience that your set is real? It's obviously not! So why not just go further into the fantasy and define the made up reality of your film? I also thought that I would make it so that the things flowing down the stream, namely fish, lights, etc. would be following some invisible paths like they do in real life.

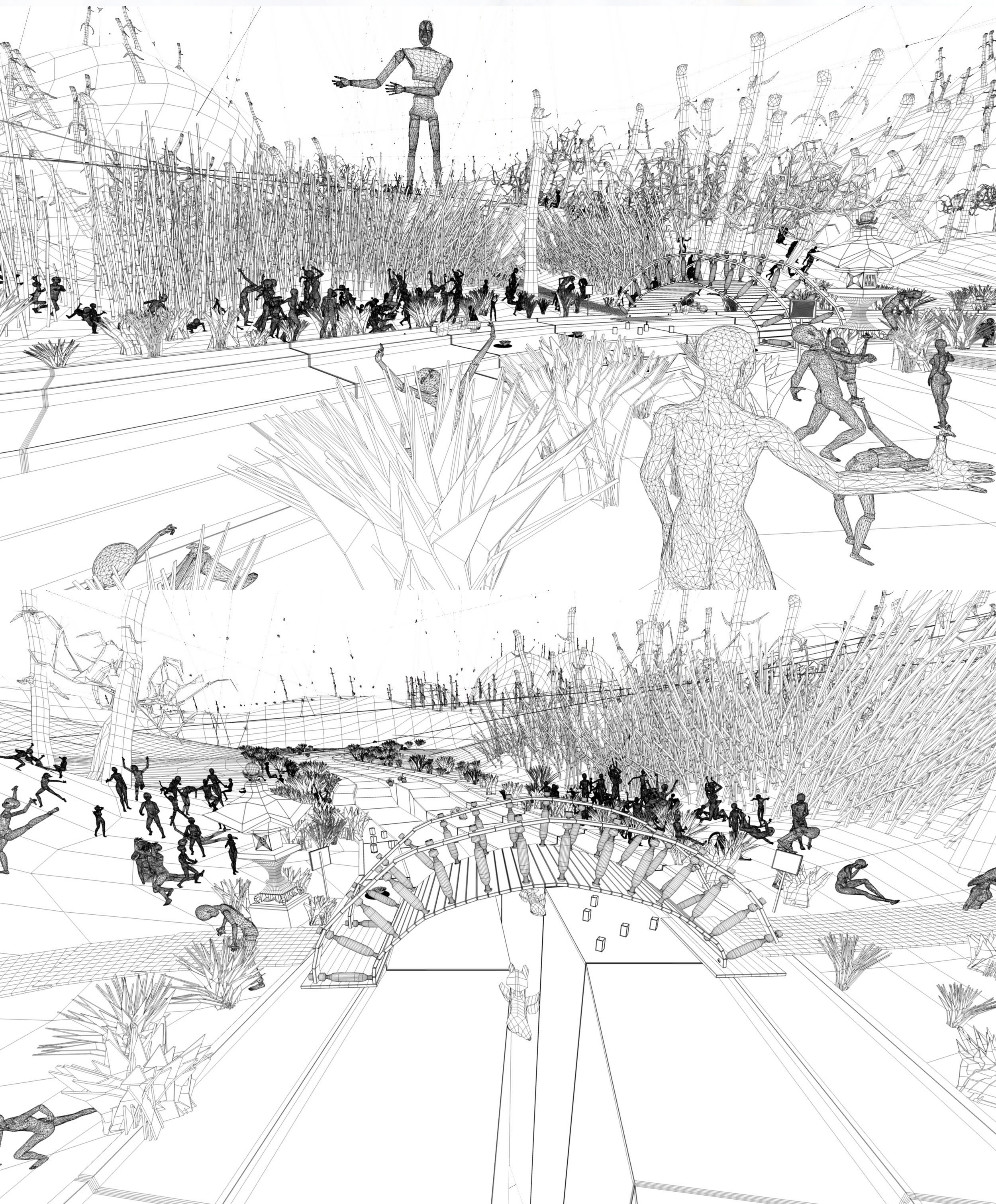
Technical: This whole set was modeled around the two sides of the River. The River itself was made by modeling river panels and then using Mograph to have them trace the landscape's coastlines. So the first thing I did was model one side of the River. Once I had one side of the River, I duplicated and flipped it so I had both sides of the River that interlocked perfectly. After that I selected the polygonal edge on the coastline and converted it into a spline and this is the spline I used with the Mograph clones, to make the River segments hug the coast perfectly. Then once I had the River between the coastlines, I used the magnet and brush tools to further sculpt the landscape into the River. The fish and other objects in the River are made using Mograph clones with the clones following splines I drew along the River. This was another set that didn't look too great in the raw 3d render phase and when I started compositing I even had my doubts, as there just wasn't enough variation in the color scheme to make the important things pop out of the scene. The whole set was just cast in a blue hue and there was a single lantern as an alternative light source. To remedy this I used the feathered mask technique to relight the scene and add in the color contrast and focus the scene needed.



Painting of water







FOUR CORNERS

Concept: This set is a meeting place wherein four main paths meet. The world of HSM has become somewhat deserted, with everyone turning into the Mannequins that litter the landscapes. So this is one place where groups of people actually coalesce. To make Tatsuya even more of a stalker weirdo, I wanted to show the first time he caught a glimpse of Siouxsie, which led him astray from his supreme servitude in Lord Wor's army. This set was inspired by many I have seen in old samurai films. The bulletin boards where heads would be on display, or challenges would be posted. I added a little touch way up above the set to undermine the beliefs of the people doubting the existence of Monsters. So this set was created just for Tatsuya's flashback scene, to show when he decided to stalk Siouxsie and why. This set is also featured in the scene that shows a bit of Siouxsie's back-story, concerning the reasons for her search for the Prince of Marionettes.

Technical: For this set I took four of my prefabbed landscape objects and just laid them out to make the paths between them. By this time I already had all the prop objects I needed to build out the scene, so it was just a matter of placing rocks, Mannequins, lanterns etc. I can't stress how EASY it makes things if you construct all the required elements ahead of time, granted you're always going to discover that you need to create new things. However modeling a few objects is a lot easier than starting from scratch with each scene. This set, like many of them, has a wire structure connecting the landscape to the sky. I created these skywires using the wire object that comes with the C4d plugin Surface Spread. These wires are connected to the Nether World up above.





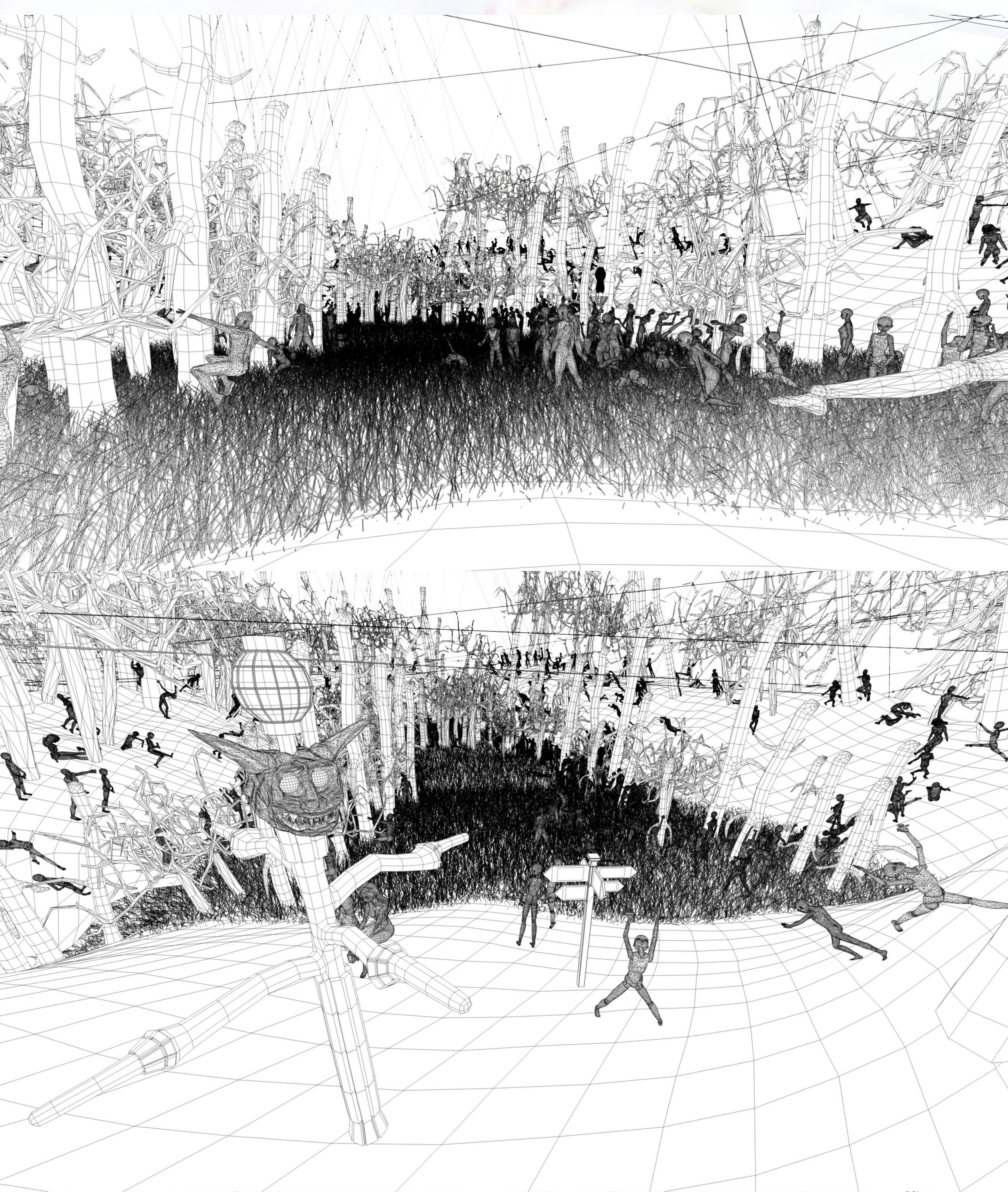


FIELD OF NIGHTMARES

Concept: For this set it is all about what lurks below it. I'm not going to say what lurks below this set, except that it's something very interesting! Since I wanted to hide what might be below this set I decided to cover the ground with grass, so if there is something weird going on slightly below the surface you won't be able to see it. So this set is my creepy forest, and I DO LOVE creepy forests, so I was happy that this set came out so well. This set is a place of ambush, robbers, monsters, evil ronin, etc. With this set I wanted to make it so once you go down into the little valley, you only have two ways to go. Either straight ahead or back where you came from. Samhaine visits this place twice and exits two different ways.

Technical: This is the only set that has dynamic grass. I used C4d's hair system to do the grass, with some wind for the breeze. I initially went for realism with the grass, but I found out pretty quickly that for the amount of grass and the quality of the grass required for a set of that size made things way too slow and cumbersome for my liking. So I dialed things down

for a more stylized, sparse look. Even with my optimizations things were going too slow, as I found that in Cinema 4d version 11 the hair system was not multithreaded. To get around this, I split the pieces of ground which the hair would grow out of into 8 different pieces. That way each cpu core would have something to chew on during renders and this sped things up a lot. The lighting in this scene worked out really well. I used bluish volumetric rays of moonlight in the background, with reddish-orange torches placed throughout the set for the warm highlights. When I got to the composting phase with this set, I didn't have to do any heavy modifications. I actually didn't screw with the color at all and only crushed the blacks a little on the levels side of things, since the lighting worked very well out of the 3d renderer. In this set I also had to have something breaking through and emerging out of the ground. I did that by taking a large flat rectangle and using the Xplode plugin, in conjunction with a spline generated with the Ivy Grower plugin to slice up the geometry. Then I made a low poly proxy version of the thing that is supposed to explode out of the ground. I used Mograph dynamics for the dynamics sim, then added some practical dust and debris in the comp phase to polish off the effect.

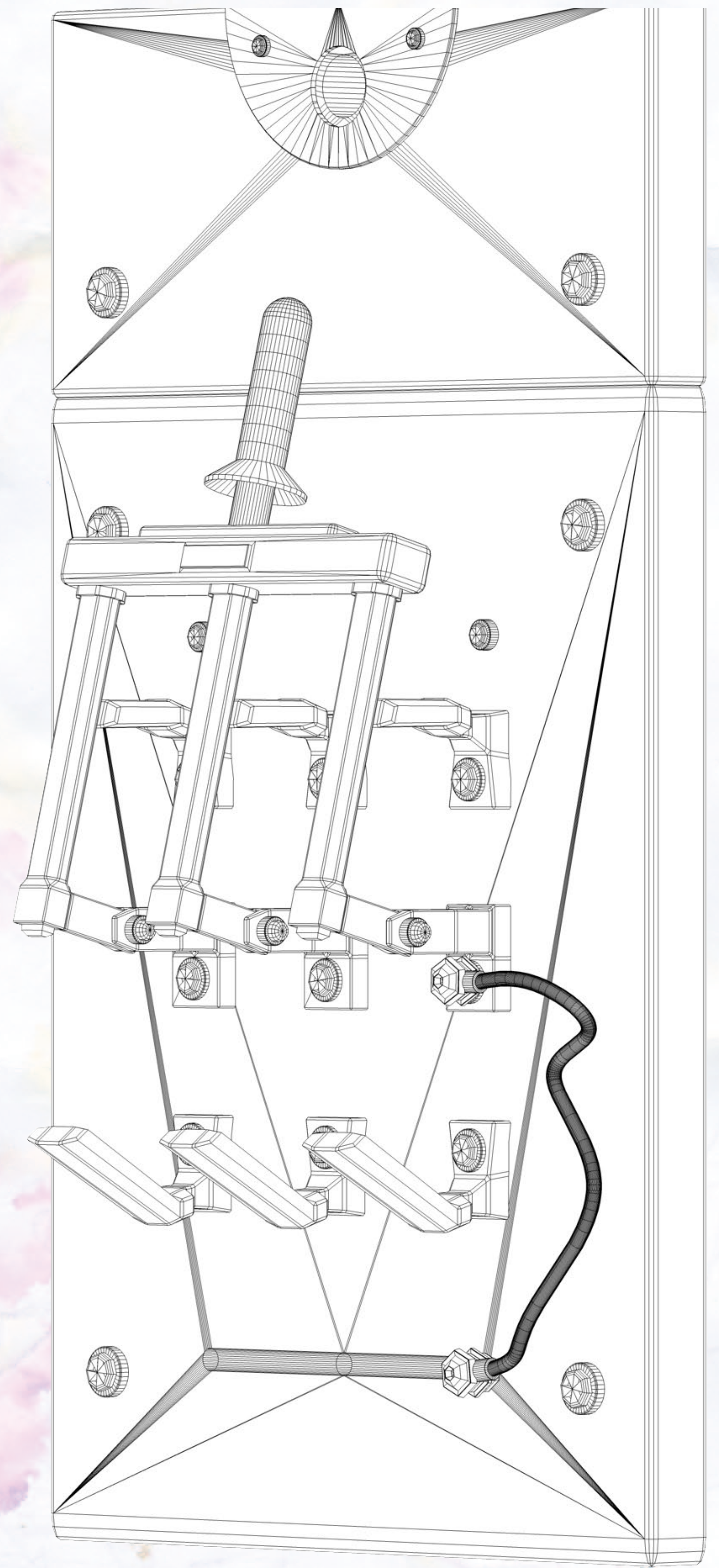




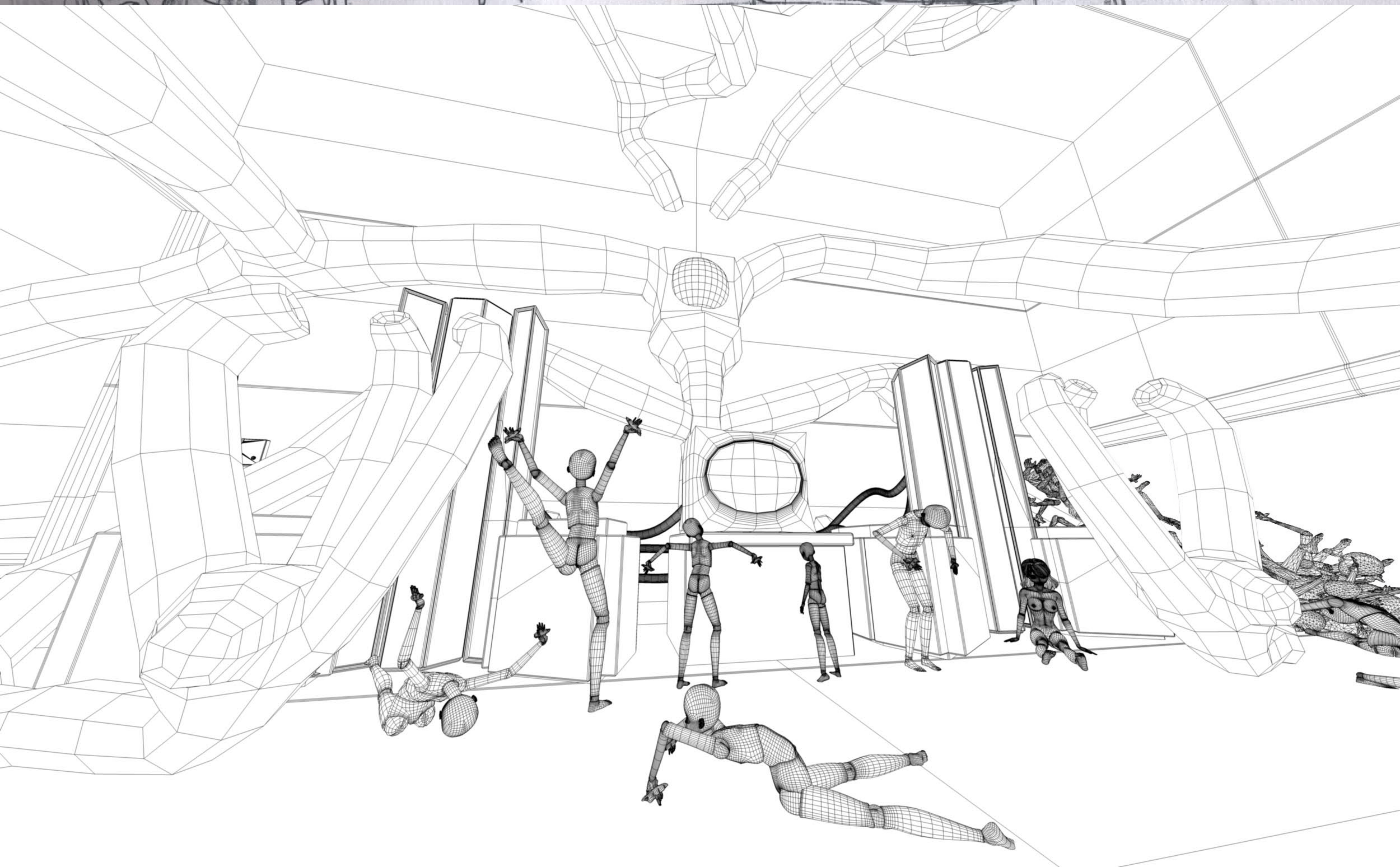
LORD WOR'S LABORATORY

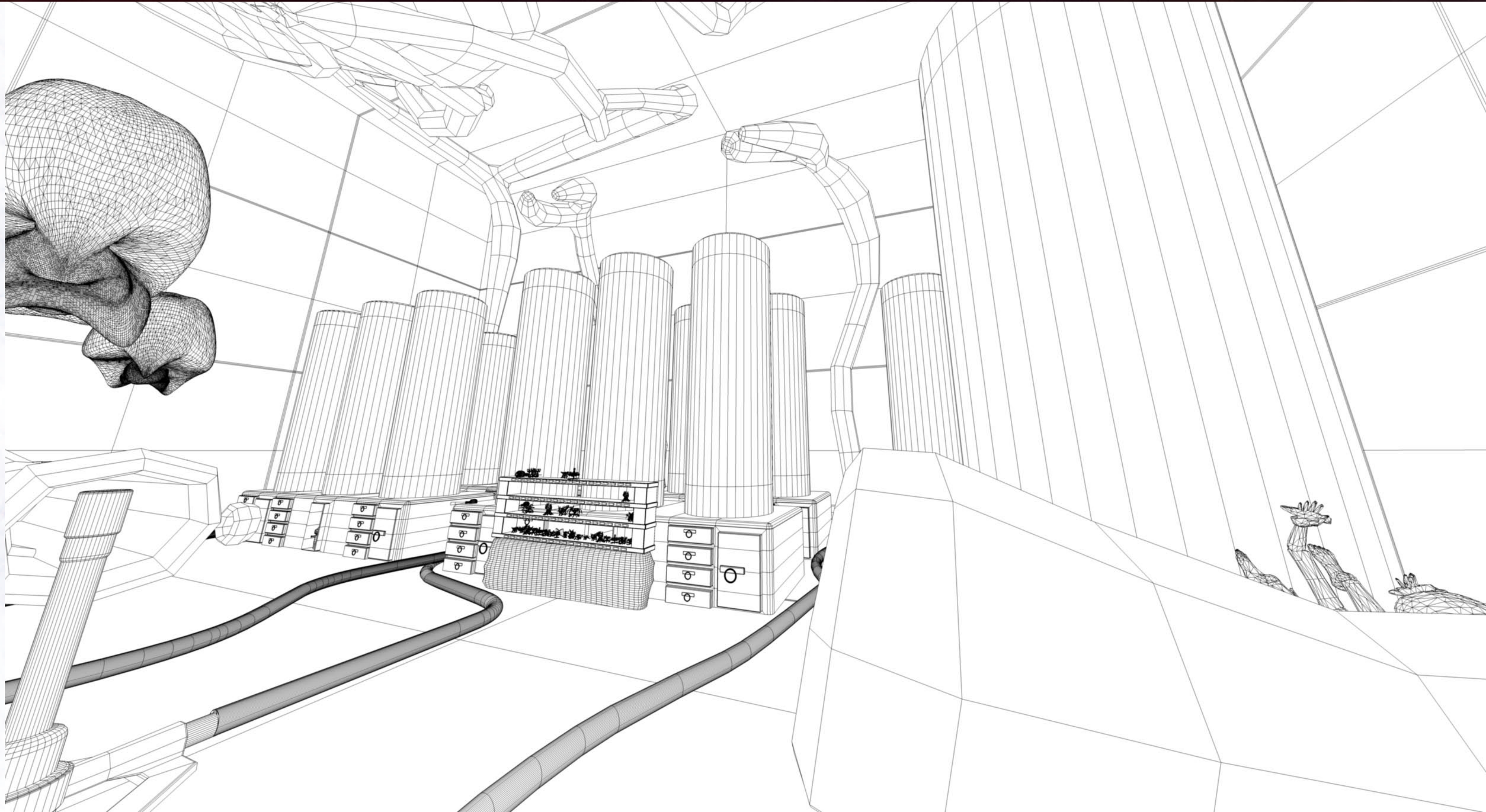
Concept: Rumors say that Lord Wor has a secret laboratory in his temple that he built dedicated to The Devil, called The Haus that Wor Built?! This underground lab is where Lord Wor supposedly creates the horrible Monsters that ravage the countryside. People say that he creates the Monsters by converting normal people into them. Supposedly he also found some sort of fountain of youth that he uses for himself. It's also rumored that the gate to hell is somewhere in his lab?!? So this is supposed to be the secret lab where a madman works to make Monsters. So, ofcourse, I modeled it after my bedroom! I wanted to have all kinds of weird low tech machinery, some organic things roughly mixed with old electronic. Sort of like frankenstein cyberpunk. I wasn't going for realistic working machinery, I wanted it to be more about black Magick and old school technology combined, with a monitor in the center playing clips from some of my short films. For reference I got images of abandoned chemistry labs from the former Soviet Union, so I modeled the tables and giant bunsen burners based on those photos.

Technical: I modeled the weird creature looking thing, that kind of fills and wraps around the lab, in Zbrush with Zspheres. To make sure the creature molded to the room properly I made the room in C4d, then exported it as obj and brought it into Zbrush as a sub-tool. Then I just started sculpting with Zspheres inside of that box of a room. There are also a lot of giant glass jars holding various creatures in the lab. I had to spend some time tweaking the glass material to get render times down. To do this I limited the number of reflection bounces and turned off internal reflections. Again, I wasn't going for realism, I was going for a look I liked with reasonable render times. The lab is connected to a larger room with some VERY intricate things in it. There is a giant bizarre pipe organ in this room that is probably the most complex model of the whole film. The pipe organ came in very late in the game. Endika and I were talking about our love of pipe organs and then he mentioned he'd like to write some music for one, so I was like "I'll model one for X character to play!" So then I jumped into Zbrush and modeled the basic parts then used Mograph cloners to replicate things it and it came out awesome. It plays and everything! The pipe organ was so big that it didn't even fit in the room, but the beauty of building in 3d is that you can easily and cheaply remodel your buildings! So I had to enlarge the room to fit the pipe organ into it.



I modelled that switch based on photos of a real electric chair switch

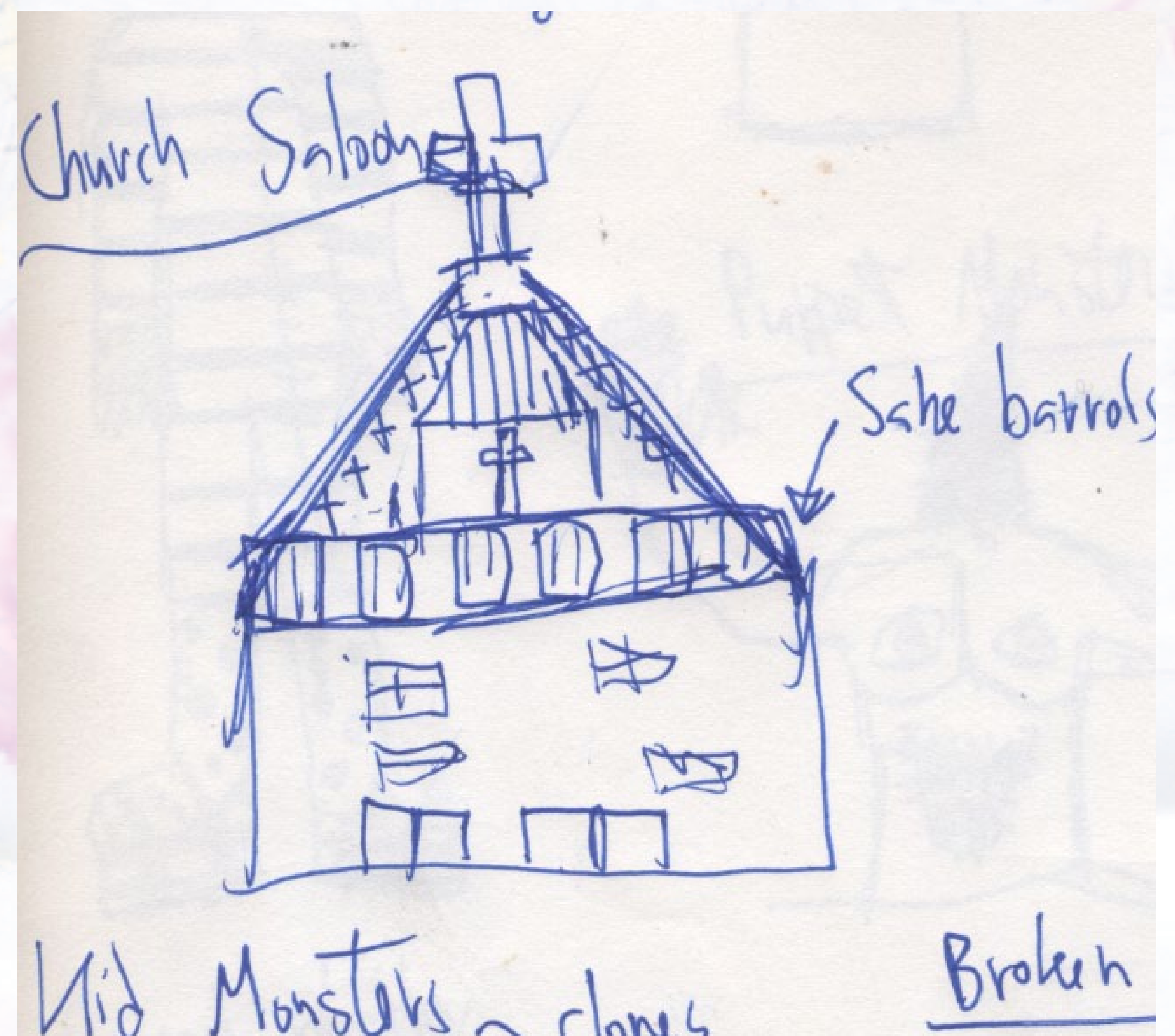




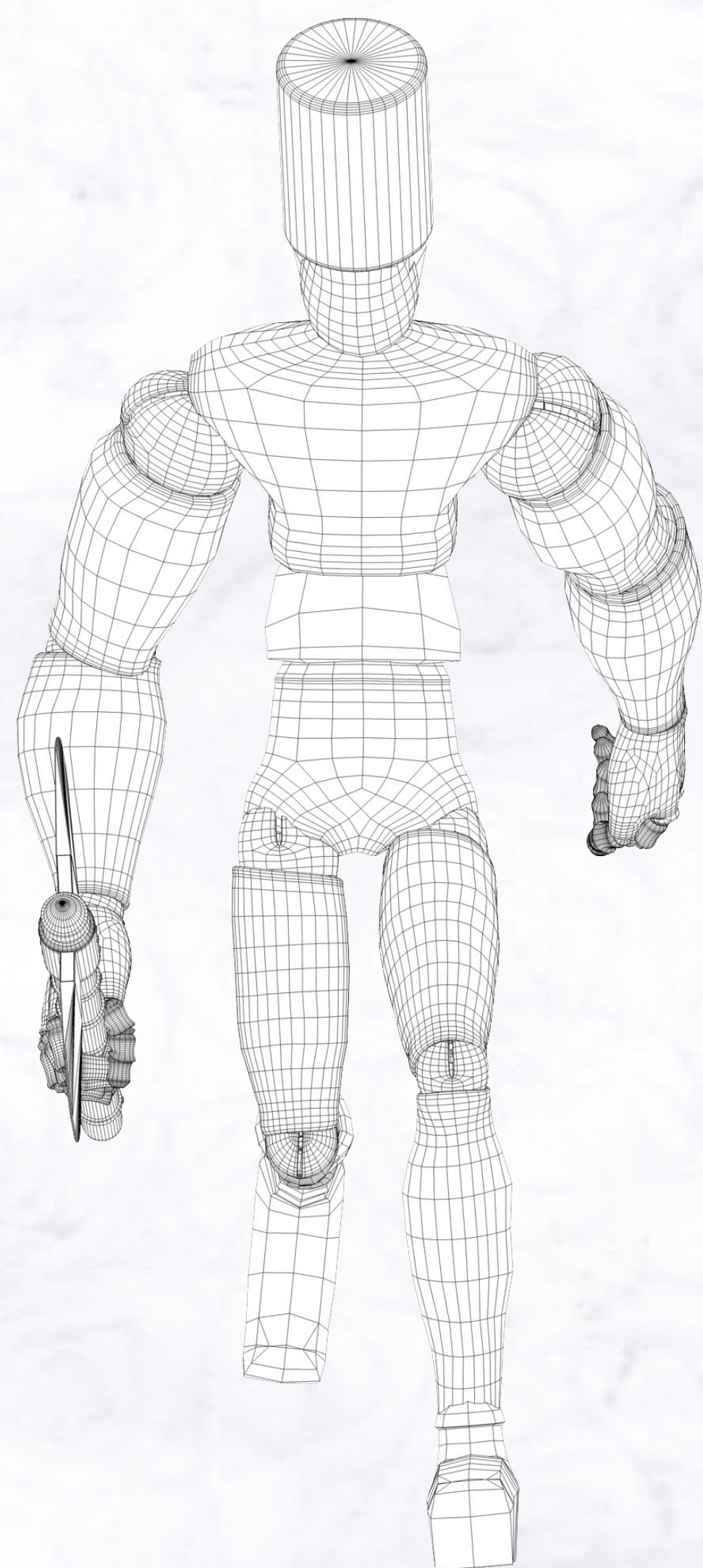
VILLAGE OF THE HOLY BODY

Concept: This is a village under the control of a psycho religious cult leader. There is religious iconography all over the village, culminating in the half church/ half bar “Salvation Saloon” at one end of the village. The town’s “spiritual leader” lives in a cabin just outside the village but he is known to drop by the homes of the village’s inhabitants whenever he feels the need to exercise his holy will. Some people say he is nothing more than a Demon that rapes and kills under the guise of divine punishment, but those that have said that all become victims of crucifixion. So this is a very somber, hushed village wherein the only noise comes from the rowdy priests drinking inside of the “Salvation Saloon”. All of the people that are born here tend to die here. The last person to leave the village was a rowdy woman named “Siouxsie Silen”, who swore she’d come back with the Prince of Marionettes to slay the Demon that terrorizes the village!? I was traveling a bit through Europe in 2007 and 2008 and I got to visit a few places that inspired this set. When in Prague I visited the “Museum of Torture” which had all sorts of horrible devices, that were used on people in the name of “god”. I didn’t reproduce any of these devices per se, but the underlying energy inspired this village and its “holy” leader. In one of the trips I was also in Rome, so I visited the Vatican. The ridiculousness of that place certainly made its mark on me as well! I also spent a little time in Bratislava and they had a particular christ on cross design that gave me some ideas as well, which I used as inspiration for the crucifixion statues in the middle of the village. As far as the architecture goes, I was going for an old west look to the town. I took some screen caps out of some of my favorite westerns like “For a Few Dollars More” and “High Plains Drifter” as reference.

Technical: I used the Mograph module to quickly model all of the buildings. When using building reference I usually break the structures down into the Y core components. It’s kind of a modular approach where I make various pieces that I can re-use and re-order to create lots of new structures from. So I’ll make a few windows, a few doors, a few wall pieces, some railing with posts, etc. then I just replicate and vary them using Mograph cloners. The Salvation Saloon was kind of a mix of

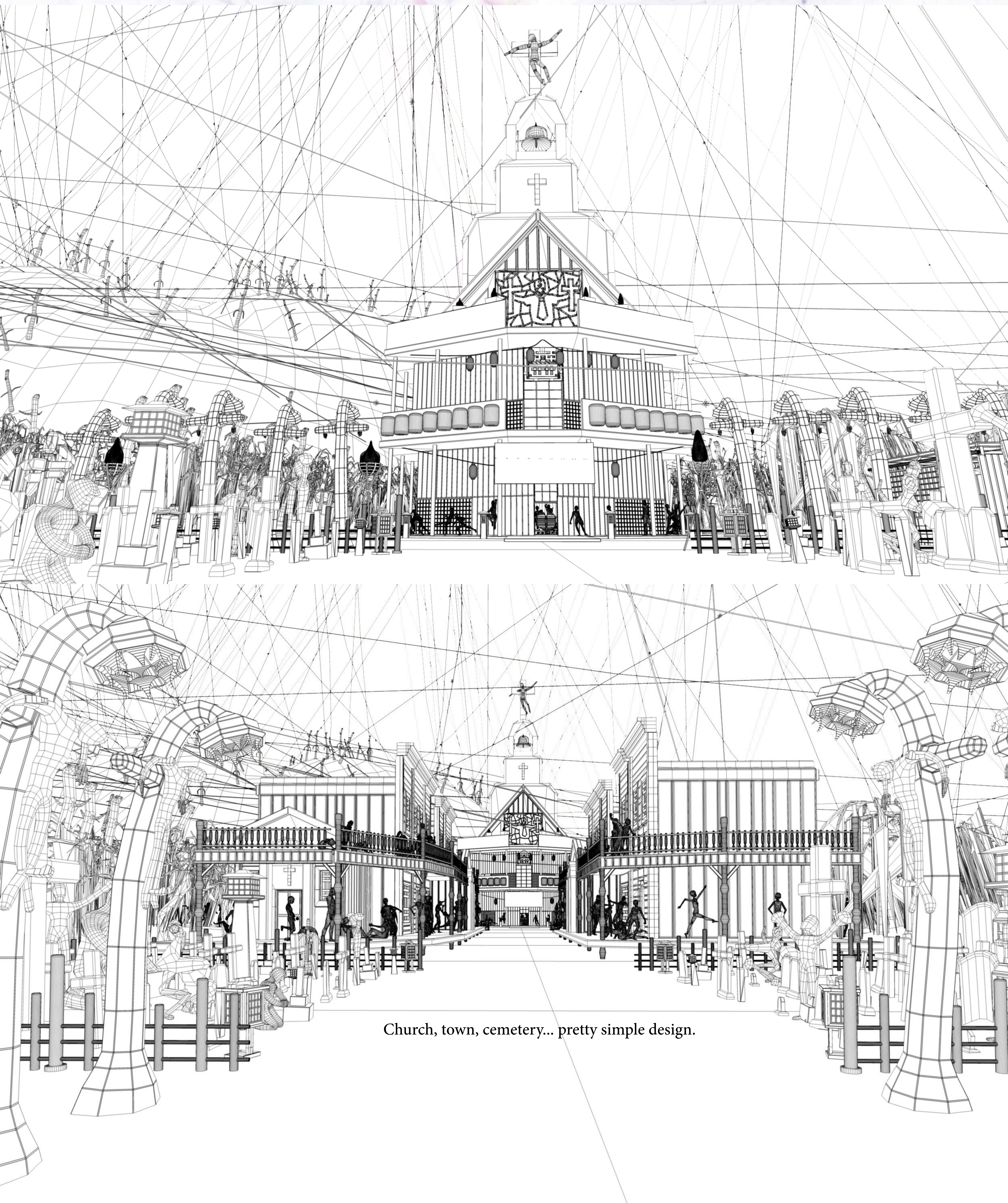


a western design and a feudal Japanese design. The building’s structure is old west saloon, yet it has a bunch of sake barrels and Japanese lanterns hanging about and a stained glass window of a figure holding crosses in his hands. I WONDER if anyone will figure out who/what that image is actually based on? Since the stained glass on the saloon projects multicolored light onto the scene, it kind of throws off the color scheme, so I had to desaturate it a lot in the comp phase to make things work. I just make “random” decisions like that sometimes. “This set will have stained glass!” I’m not sure how much of it is what’s best for the set and how much is just me wanting to do new things, so I stay interested and motivated. As long as those creative decisions don’t ruin things I’ll keep doing them.



Since Samurai films inspired Sergio Leone who made a few good westerns he didn't plain rip off from Kurosawa ^ ^ I thought I would make some screwed up Church/ Old West Saloon with Japanese motifs.



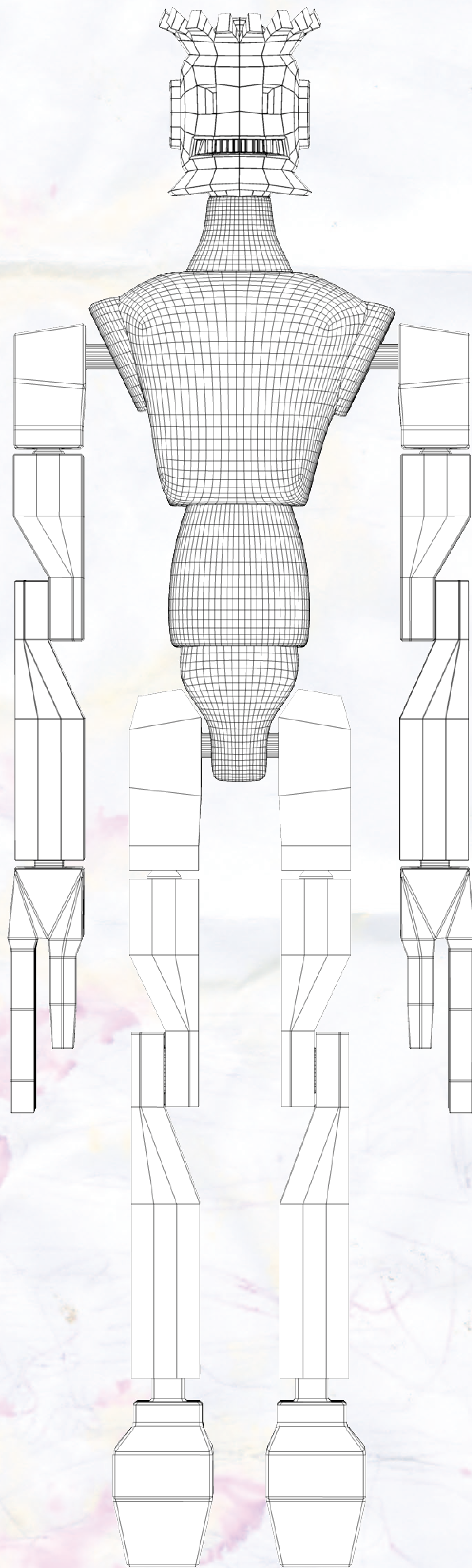


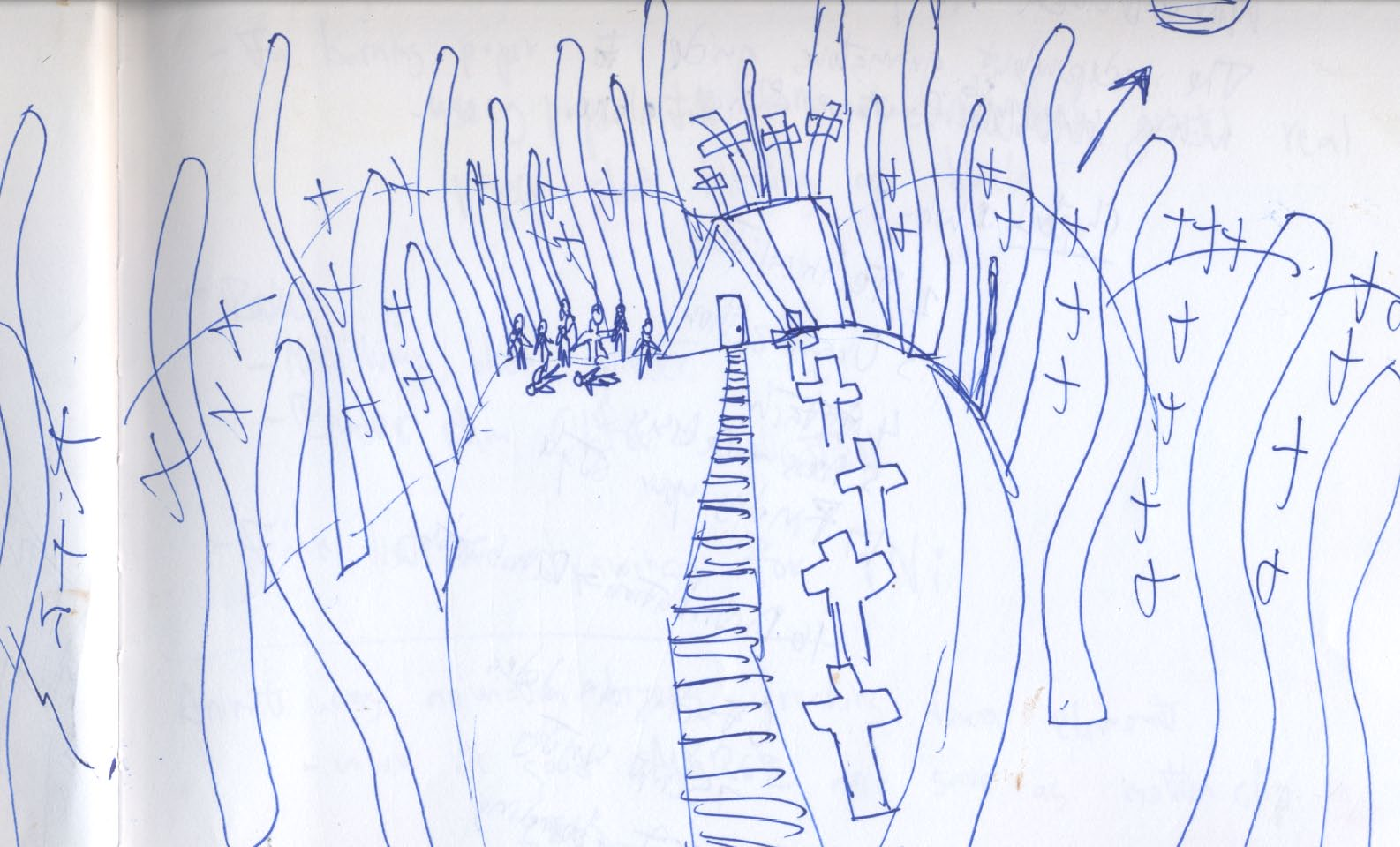
Church, town, cemetery... pretty simple design.

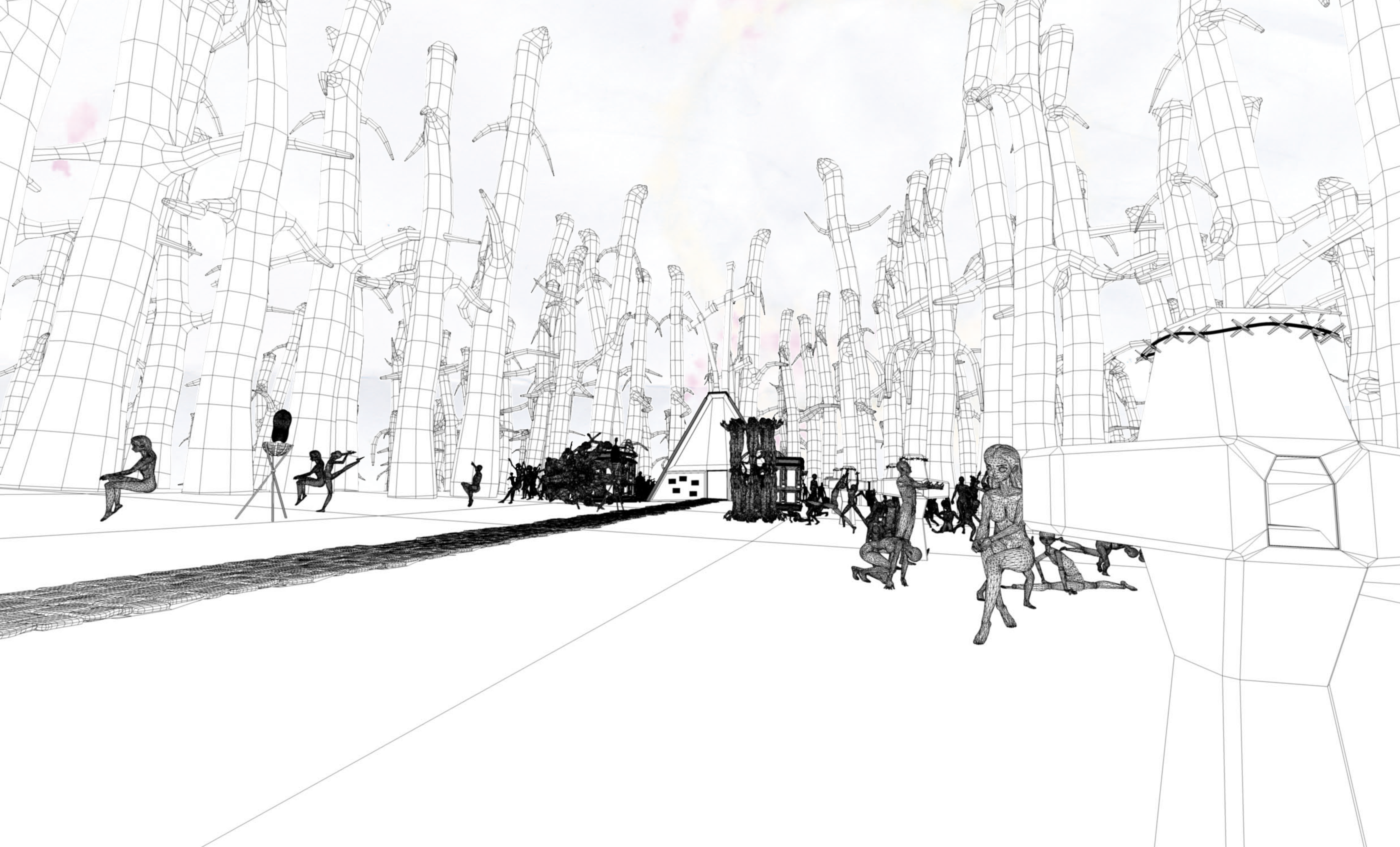
THE BODY HAUS

Concept: This is the “holy” hideaway of a religious cult leader, rapist creep. It always surprises me how many obviously slimy people are able to gain tons of followers based on just a little religious rhetoric. I wanted to design this place to make it obvious that it houses a total psycho creep, much like the old creepy pope sitting in the Vatican or the tons of catholic priests who have raped and molested children, whilst being protected by, and hiding behind, the church. I was an altar boy for a few days and it was definitely one of the creepiest things I’ve experienced. Visiting the Vatican brought me some inspiration for this set as well. The Vatican was so gaudy and ridiculous both in its look and its customs. One of the weirdest things about being raised catholic for me was the whole confession thing. As a kid you sit in some dark box whilst some old man gives you your punishment for simply being a kid?! Sitting outside the Body Haus are two confessionals that I modeled based on ones that I saw inside the big cathedral in the Vatican. They seemed like good places for a creep to hide in, just like in real life!

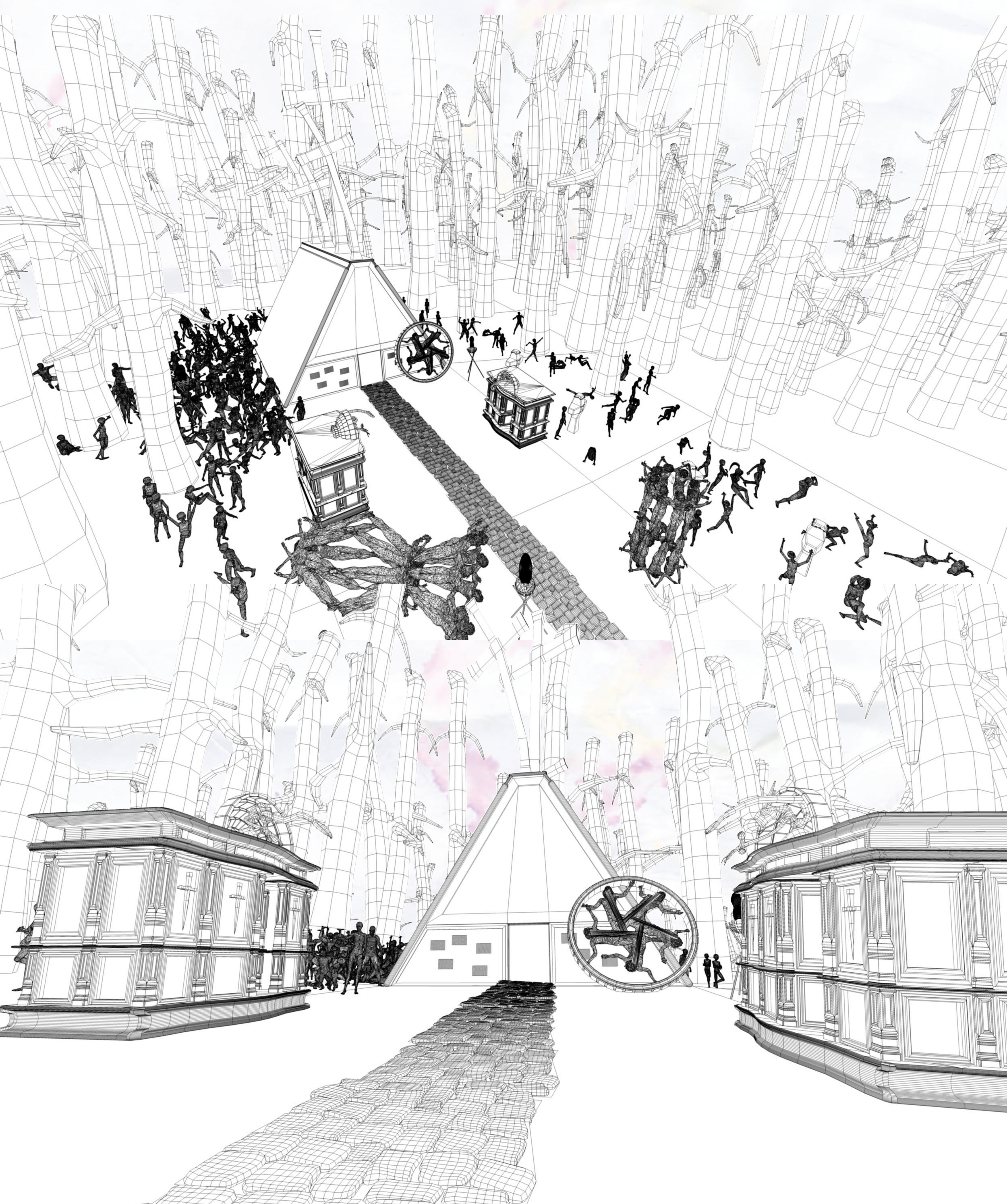
Technical: I modeled the actual house based on an old bible I’ve had since I was a kid. I scanned the bible cover and used that as the texture for the Haus itself, so going into the Haus is like going inside of the bible. Much like taking any mythology as literal fact, the inside of the body’s Haus is a big mess! Just like the real world is from all these people arguing about whose mythology is truth, when it is all just mythology. I also used the pages of the same bible as the texture that is wrapped around all the Mannequins in the world of HSM. Wrapped up in dogmatic rhetoric? MAYBE! This set is up on a hill, so the matte paintings are visible from all angles. I created a few matte paintings for every set ahead of time, that I added in the compositing phase. If you look at my concept art this set ended up almost exactly how I planned it, which always surprises me when it happens. I’ve found that the more you design and model things, the closer you can come in the 3d phase to your actual design.

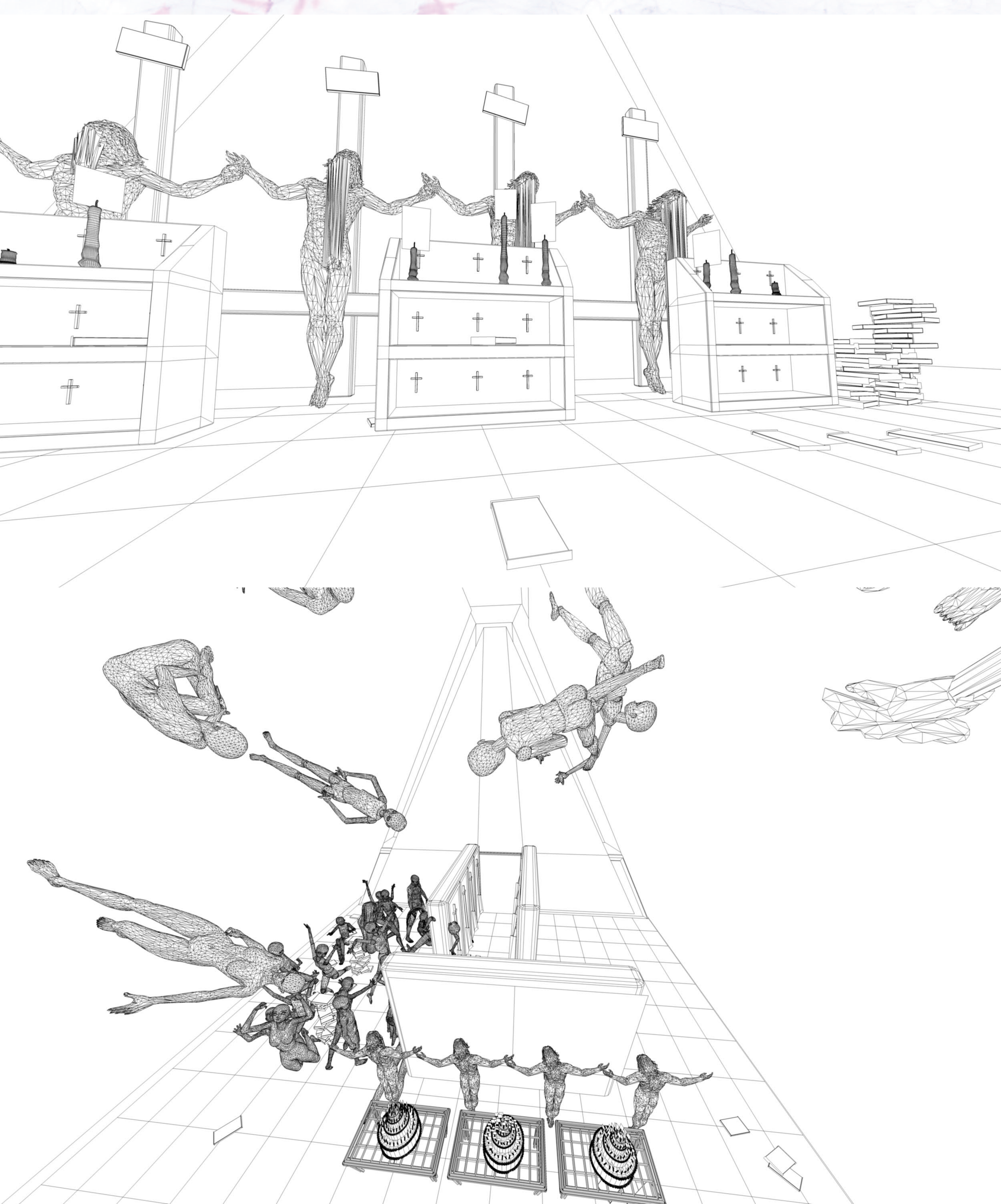








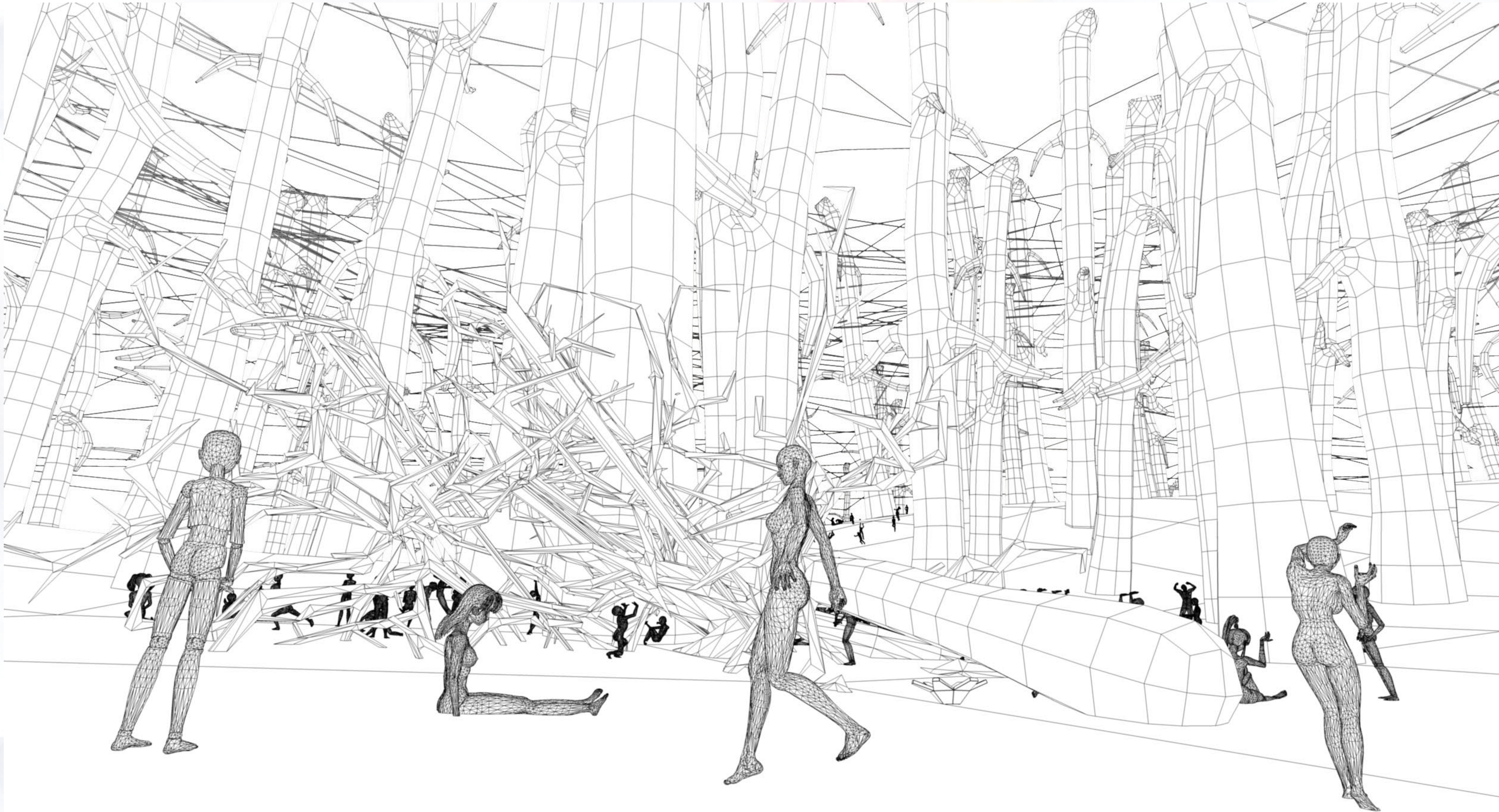




THE LOST WOODS

Concept: The Lost Woods are directly behind the Body Haus, so if anyone were to ever try to escape from the Body Haus, they would end up wandering in them. This set only needed to exist for a few scenes in the film, wherein one of the characters is chasing a flying monster.

Technical: This set is very simple with just a small valley with tons of trees and a giant fire burning in the center of said valley. The lighting is done with only bluish volumetric moon light and the reddish-orange light of the fire in the center.



OKAMOTO VILLAGE

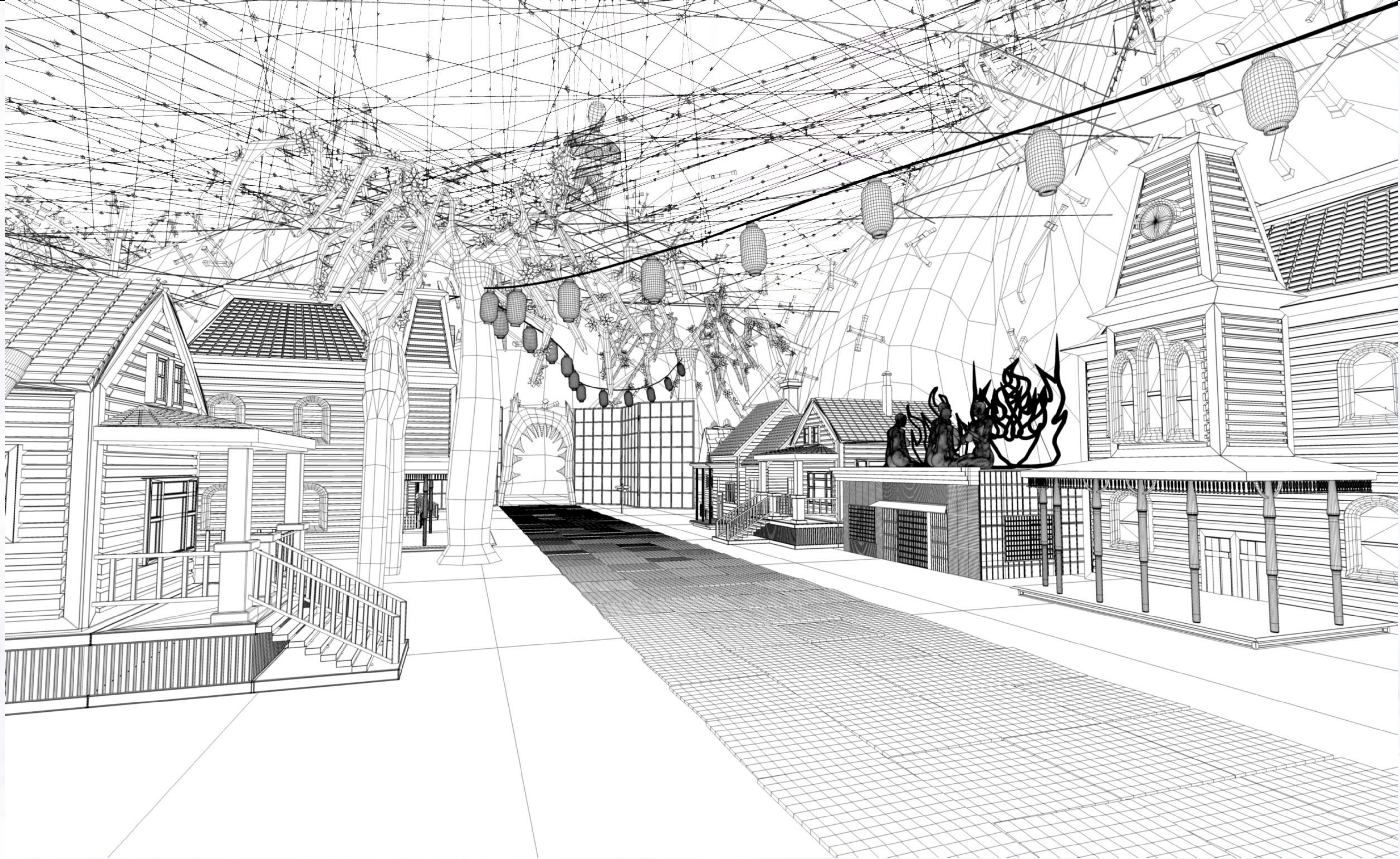
Concept: This is just a quiet little village filled with prostitutes for some reason and little else! The name of this village comes from Kihachi Okamoto, director of many of my favorite Samurai films including “Sword of Doom”. In a previous version of the script there was also a Gosha Village, named after another of my favorite Samurai film directors Hideo Gosha, who made amazing films like “Samurai Wolf”, “Goyokin” and “Hunter in the Dark”. In an earlier version of the script there was a Wizard of Oz inspired killing spree that took place in this village. I decided to model all the houses in the village based on ones in the Wizard of Oz. The Wizard of Oz houses stayed even though the killing spree was removed, making it even more bizarre. I was playing with the idea of movie backlots and theater sets, just facades that are empty inside. There was no reason for this set to exist in this world, other than to have place for two characters to converse and for a place to slaughter children. So I didn’t even try to make it seem alive and inhabited. This is what I love about fantasy and not trying to create a realistic cinematic reality. You have so much more to play with once you get away from the literal and closer to the abstract. This town is definitely an abstraction. You may recognize the prostitutes who are standing in the village, repeating the Y engrish catch phrases in

the white picket fence weirdness of this place.

Technical: It was pretty fun making the Wizard of Oz houses that make up most of this village. When you have good enough reference images for a structure, it’s just about breaking that structure into more manageable pieces, creating those pieces and then putting them together. I used the Mograph module once again to assemble the houses, as they all had lots of repetitive structures. Later on in the scenes this set was used, for it gets windy, so I had to make the lines of lanterns dynamic. All I did was use spline dynamics on the spline that was being swept, to make the line that the lanterns were on. I attached the lanterns to the line by attaching them to specific points on the spline via Xpresso. I initially tried using collider tags on the lanterns, but they just slid all over the line. Since I hate re-running dynamic sims for every scene, I just ran the sim of the lanterns blowing in the wind once and cached it, then used the same cached sim for every shot they were required in.

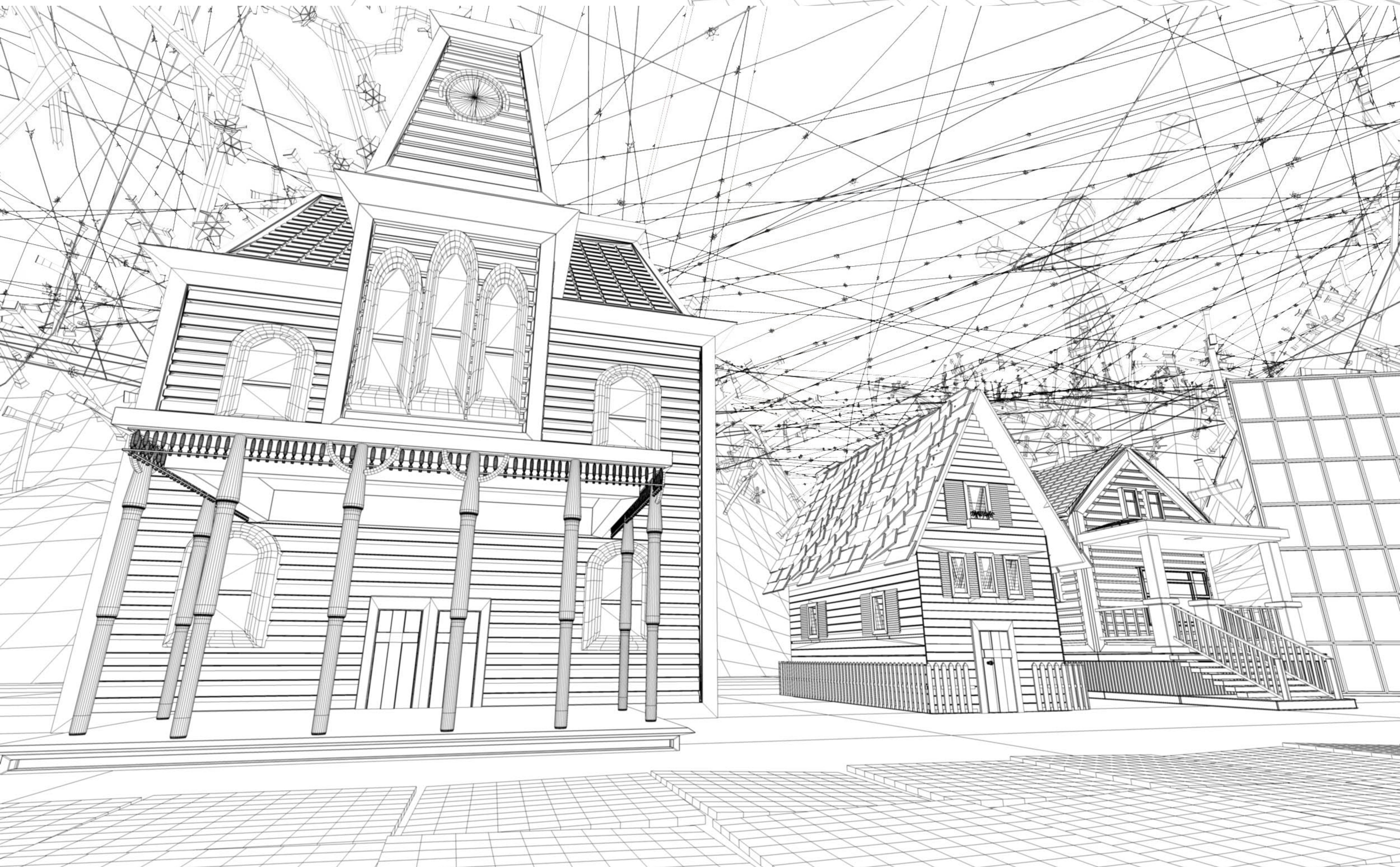
I took the name of this village from one of my favorite directors, Kihachi Okamoto







There's no place like home.



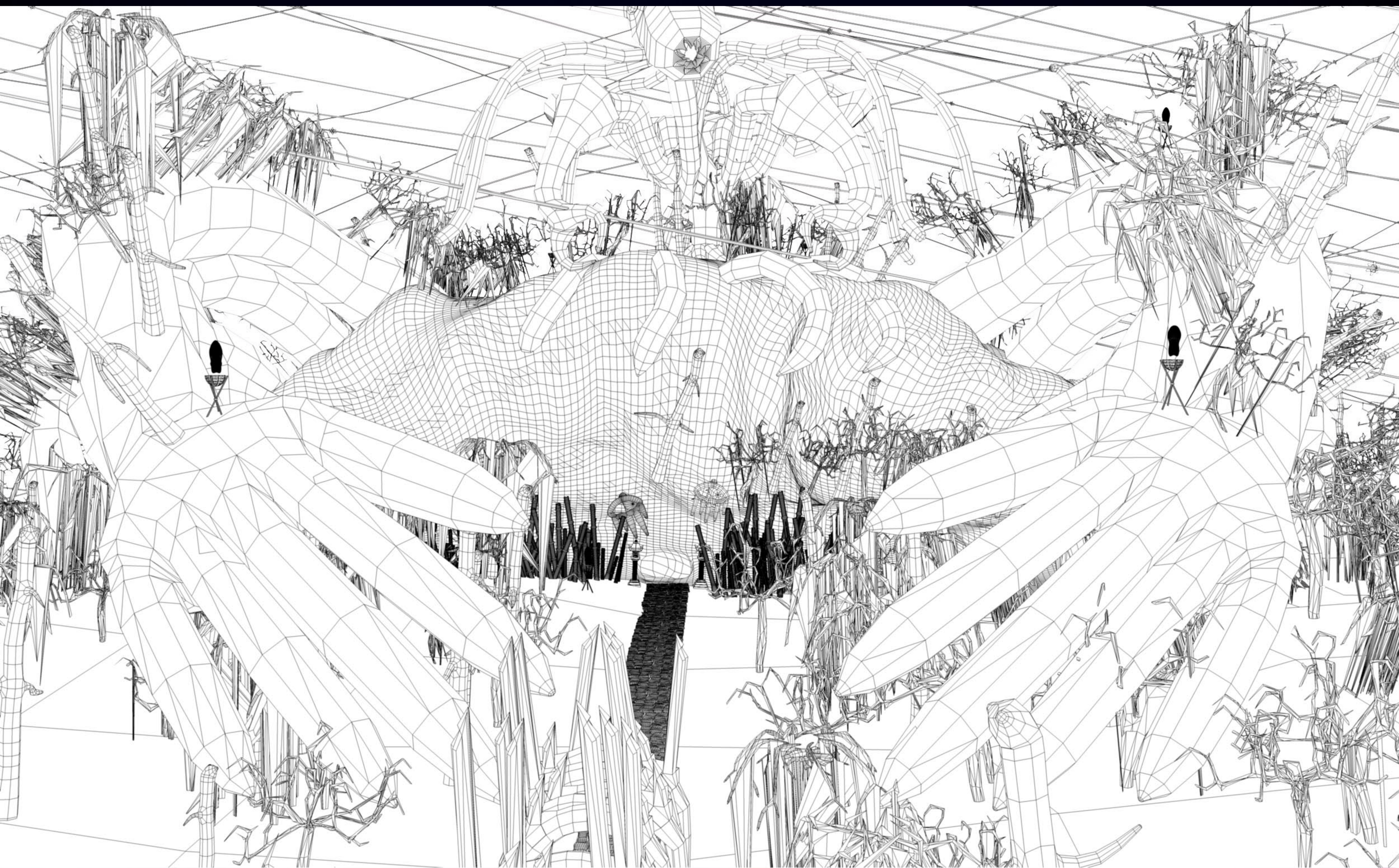
THE CRYING CAVE

Concept: This is where lost souls go after they have cried theY last tears. They have no more tears to cry, so the cave cries for them. It's the last refuge for the defeated, the depressed, the lost and alone. It overlooks Wor Manor, a place sure to have caused much despair and angst. I've always liked anthropomorphizing inanimate objects in my art, so this was my chance to take a cave and give it arms to reach out to the lost, a face to keep them company and tears to weep for those that have none. When

we're happy it seems as if the sun is smiling upon us and the birds are singing along with our cheerful happy thoughts, but when we're depressed it feels like the sky spits upon us and the birds are laughing at us. Our moods really do change our perception and change our worlds, so this set was me changing the world around those who seek refuge in the cave.

Technical: Since the cave needed arms and a face I sculpted it all in Zbrush. It was a super low poly sculpt but I've found Zbrush excels at low poly sculpts, just like it does when you go about 9million polys+. After I had the initial sculpt for the landscape, I used Paint on Surface to paint trees onto its surface.



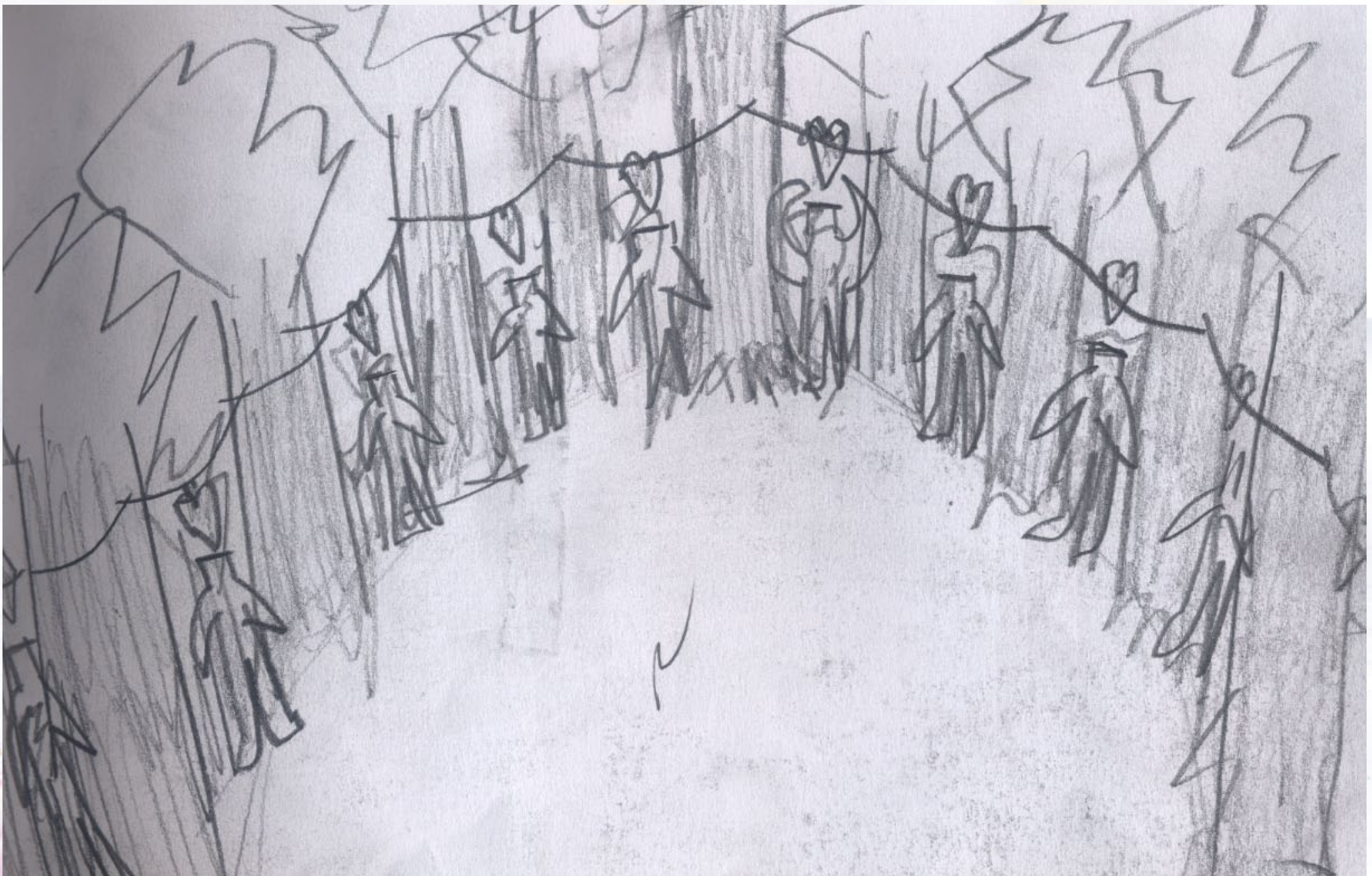


MANNEQUIN GRAVEYARD

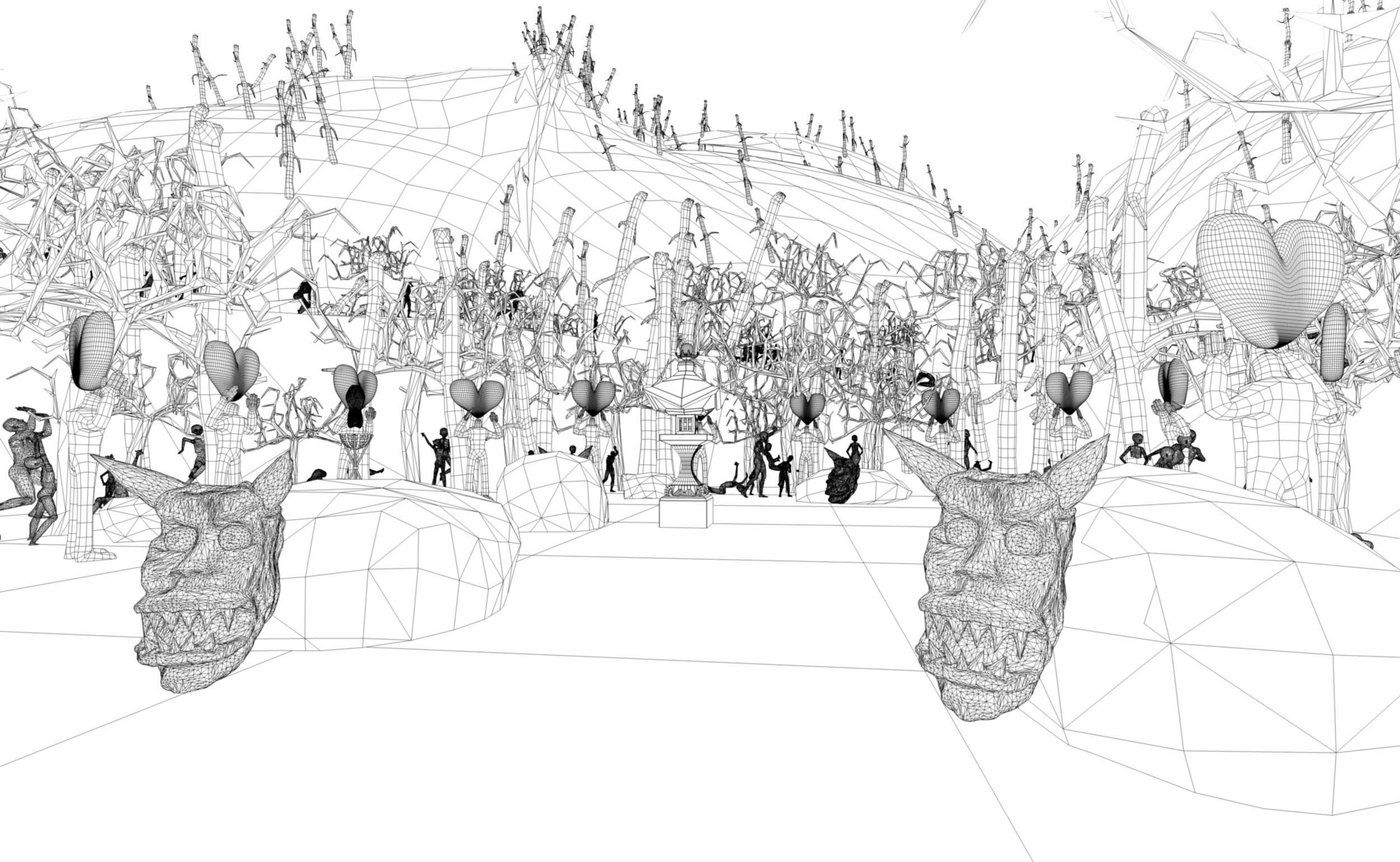
Concept: There's so many Mannequins in this place and the way they're piled on top of each other in some places it seems almost as if they have been dumped here?! This is a very quiet place that seems to be a final destination for many, many Mannequins, although no one knows how they got here. Some people have said that they've seen a wasplike creature carrying a cage full of what looked to be Mannequins flying near the Mannequin Graveyard. So this place seems to be a Mannequin dump, although the way some of the Mannequins are arranged, it seems as though someone or something has been putting some care into them? The existence of this place calls into question the

common belief as to how people become Mannequins in the first place.

Technical: This is one of the few sets where I used actual 3d ground fog. I just used a square volumetric light on the ground set to illuminate nothing for the ground fog. It's really tough to manage the contrast in a scene when using this type of fog and if I were to do it again I would have rendered the scene without the fog and done the fog as a separate pass, which I could tweak out in the comp phase. If I would have rendered it as a separate pass then I would have been able to mask it and vary its thickness where I wanted in the scene. The more control and flexibil-



Headless mannequins with hearts instead of heads? I must be saying something?!



ity you have over the lighting in the compositing phase the better.

THE HAUS THAT WOR BUILT

Concept: A gigantic temple that only Lord Wor's closest advisors get to set foot into. Not much is known about what is inside this temple and/or what it is for, but it's rumored that Lord Wor's laboratory lies beneath it. Every once in a while a somber song, that sounds like it is being played on a pipe organ, fills the air around this temple, but no one knows its true source. Some think that Lord Wor has made a pact with The Devil him-

self for immortality, but in exchange for what?! It is also thought that the gate to hell is somewhere inside this temple!? This place is Lord Wor's sanctuary, made possible by his ruthless dealings wherein he sacrifices the lifeblood of the common people for his own personal agenda. So this is the base for the FINAL BOSS of HSM.

Technical: I actually based the exterior design of this temple on a type of firework I liked when I was a kid, one of those red and yellow Chinese pagodas that spins around when you light it, then when its done it pops up and reveals the entire pagoda. I actually use color schemes from fireworks packaging for some of my other designs as well, like Siouxsie's umbrella, as she's a FIRECRACK-



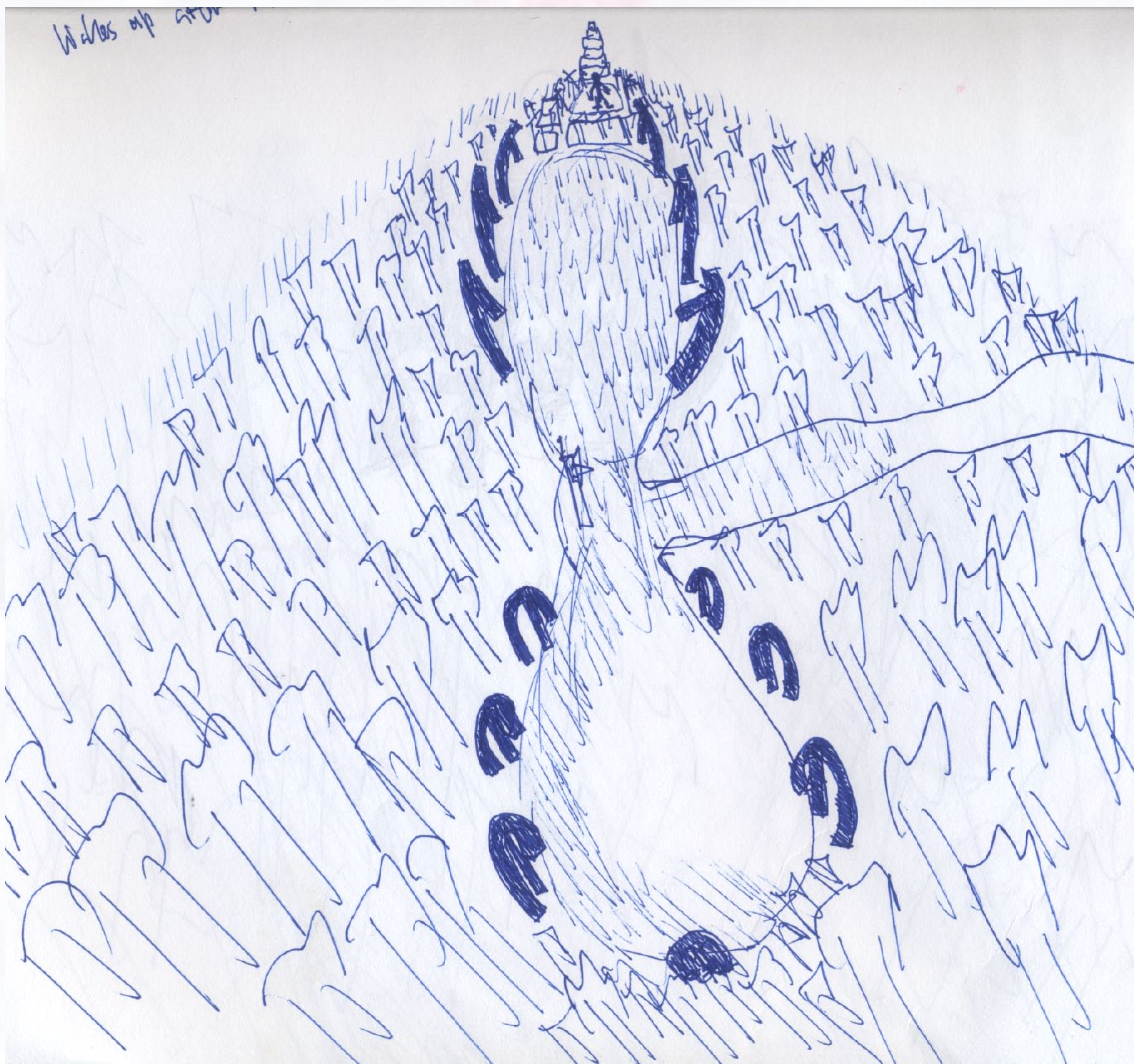
ER. To make the pagoda temple I just modeled one level, then used a Mograph cloner with a step effector for the rest.

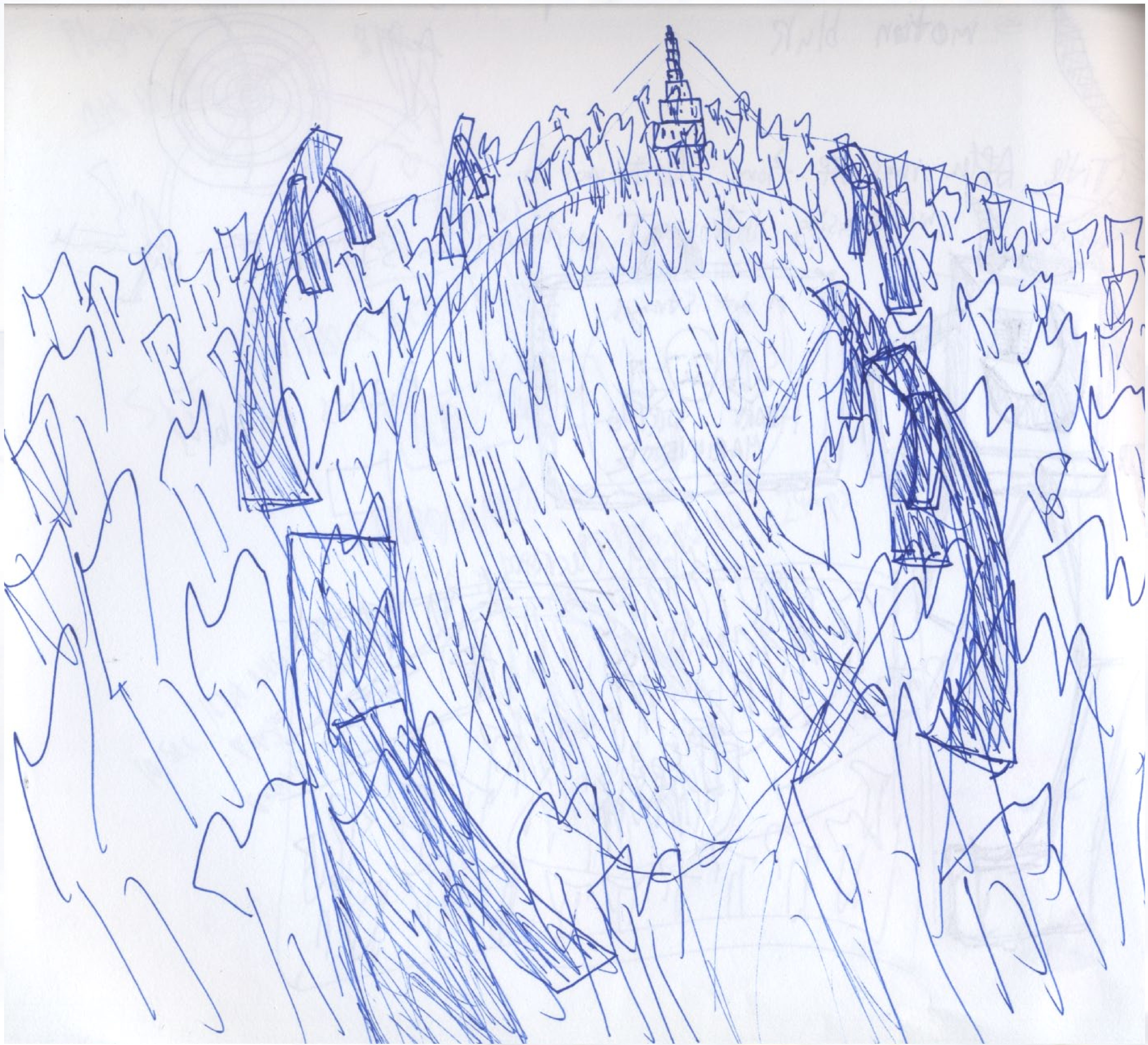
BATTLEFIELD OF DREAMS

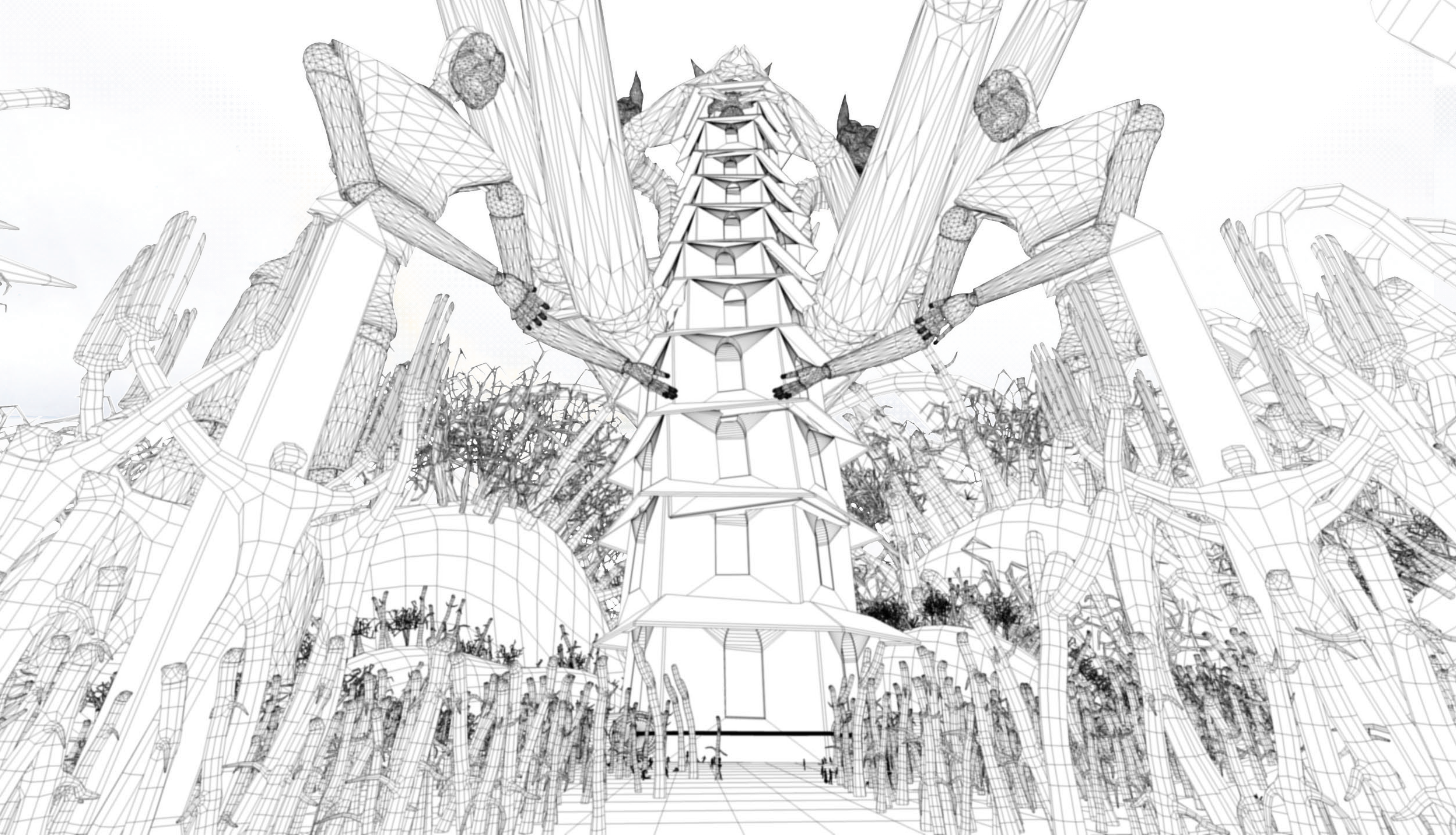
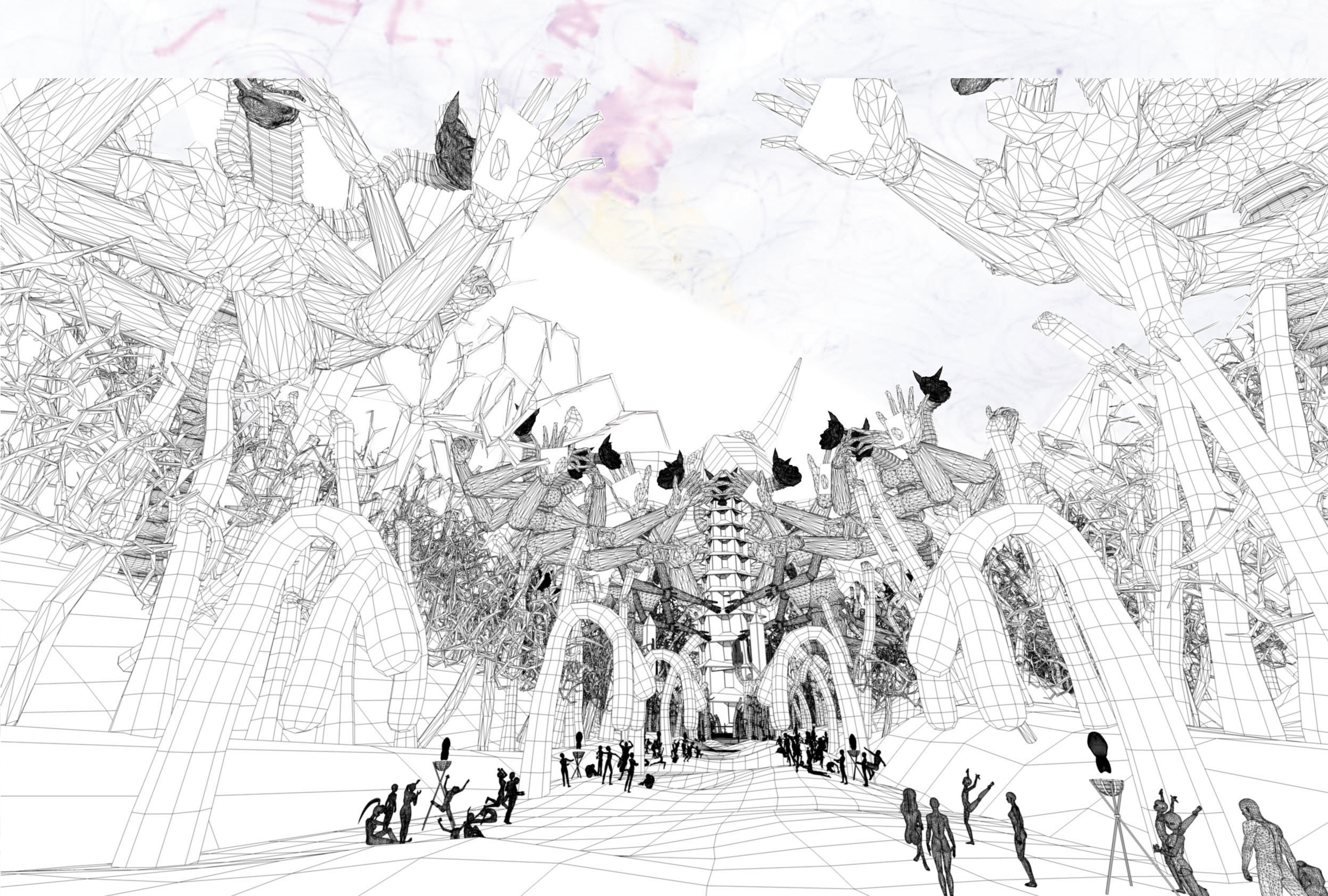
Concept: To get to The Haus That Wor Built one must first traverse through the Battlefield of Dreams. One must first face one's fears, face one's past failures and defeats before one can enter the Haus. So this place exists somewhere between the Nether World and the real world. Entering the Battlefield of Dreams turns your whole world upside down, as the sky is on the floor?! Various terrifying frozen monolithic creatures stand over you to scare away those that don't have the resolve to face death and enter the Haus. This is where the great dragon lives, the dragon that prevents you from reaching greatness, from reaching your true potential. If you come here be sure to put your Wor face on and be sure to bring a Sword! This is a place where a big battle goes down.

Technical: This is the largest and heaviest set in the whole film, so it also took the longest to render. Since this set is where the biggest spectacle takes place I made sure it was the one wherein I went all out for its design. At first it was going to be

a bunch of grassy fields, but by the time I got to animate it I decided that its color scheme was too simple, so I overhauled the whole thing and changed the natural, warm tones from the grass and torches to a bluish dreamy look. I removed the grass and instead made the ground an animated cloudy blue sky. I changed the torches so they were blue instead of the normal orange, which gave it a dreamy look I found more fitting. I tried to base most of the film in its own "reality" before flying off the handle and going all fantasy like with this set and HELL. This was another set that turned out just like the concept art. I had this sequential Zoetrope-like idea with the statues in this set, although I doubt anyone will notice it here. On one side of the set the statues are hunched over, rising up as you move along to the other end of the set, where they're reaching toward the sky. This was just a conceptual thing that kept me interested and excited while working, as I have to feel like I'm always doing something new or different to stay interested and engaged. Even though this was a huge complex set it was quick to move around in, as I use C4d's layer system to separate elements. So when animating only the things that







are absolutely necessary for me to see are visible and the rest are invisible and turned off.

HELL

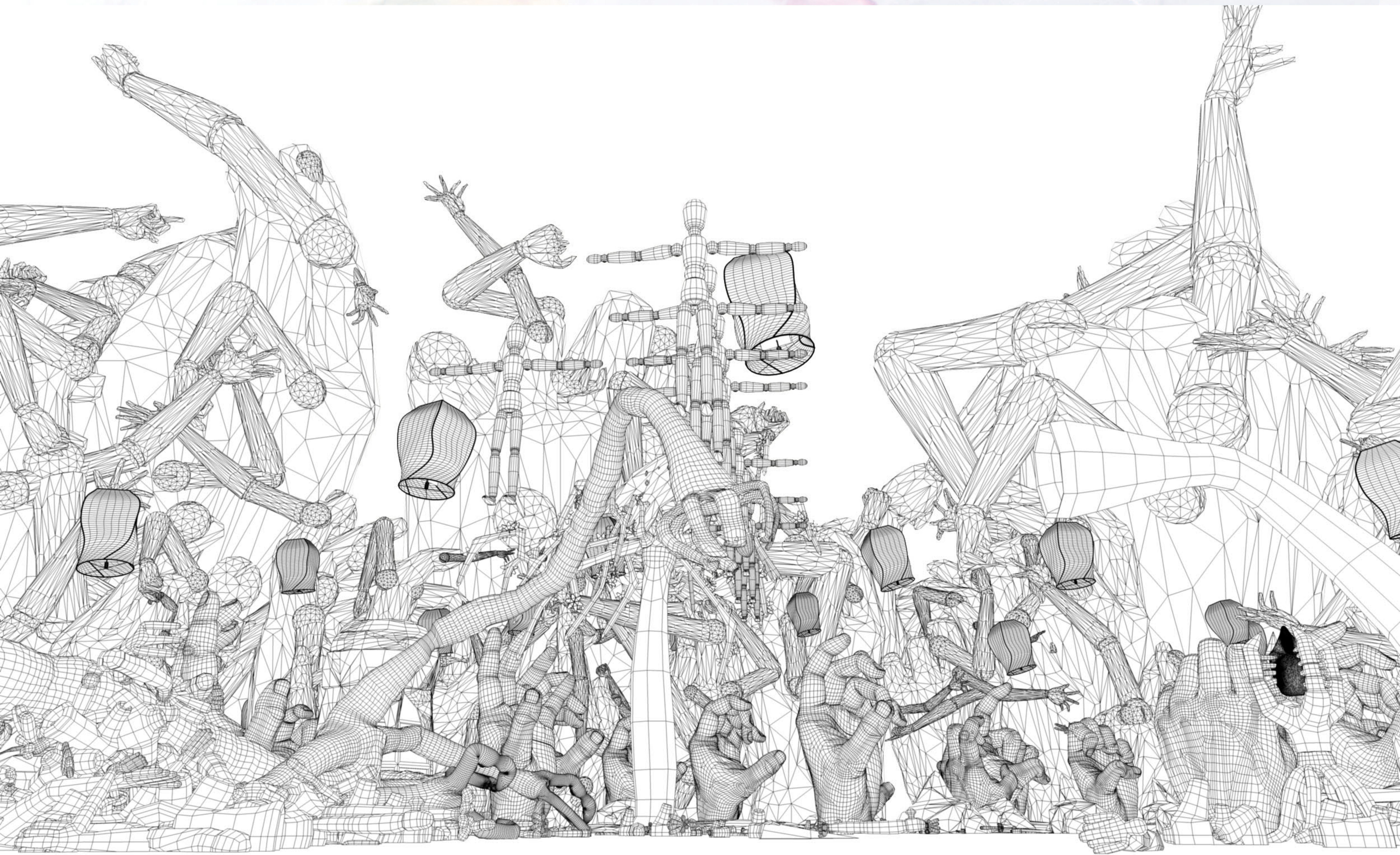
Concept: The adobe of The DEVIL. A place frozen in time, a place of regret, of forced introspection. It seems as if there is some type of machine here connected to the outside world, but who knows how it works or what it actually does? How many times have we seen hell in films and animation? Tons of times. Since Hell is such a popular place, I wanted to have a go at making my own. I decided early on that I didn't want a traditional fiery hell. I wanted an icy hell as warmth is related to life. When we say someone is warm that's usually regarded as a good thing and when someone is regarded as cold we see it usually as a negative. After seeing some glaciers and frozen landscapes in Iceland it strengthened my resolve at having a frozen hell. I took a boat ride when in Iceland where you float around some glaciers. Their massive size and cold blue hue could be a little scary. It's not like my hell is totally filled with ice, it was the

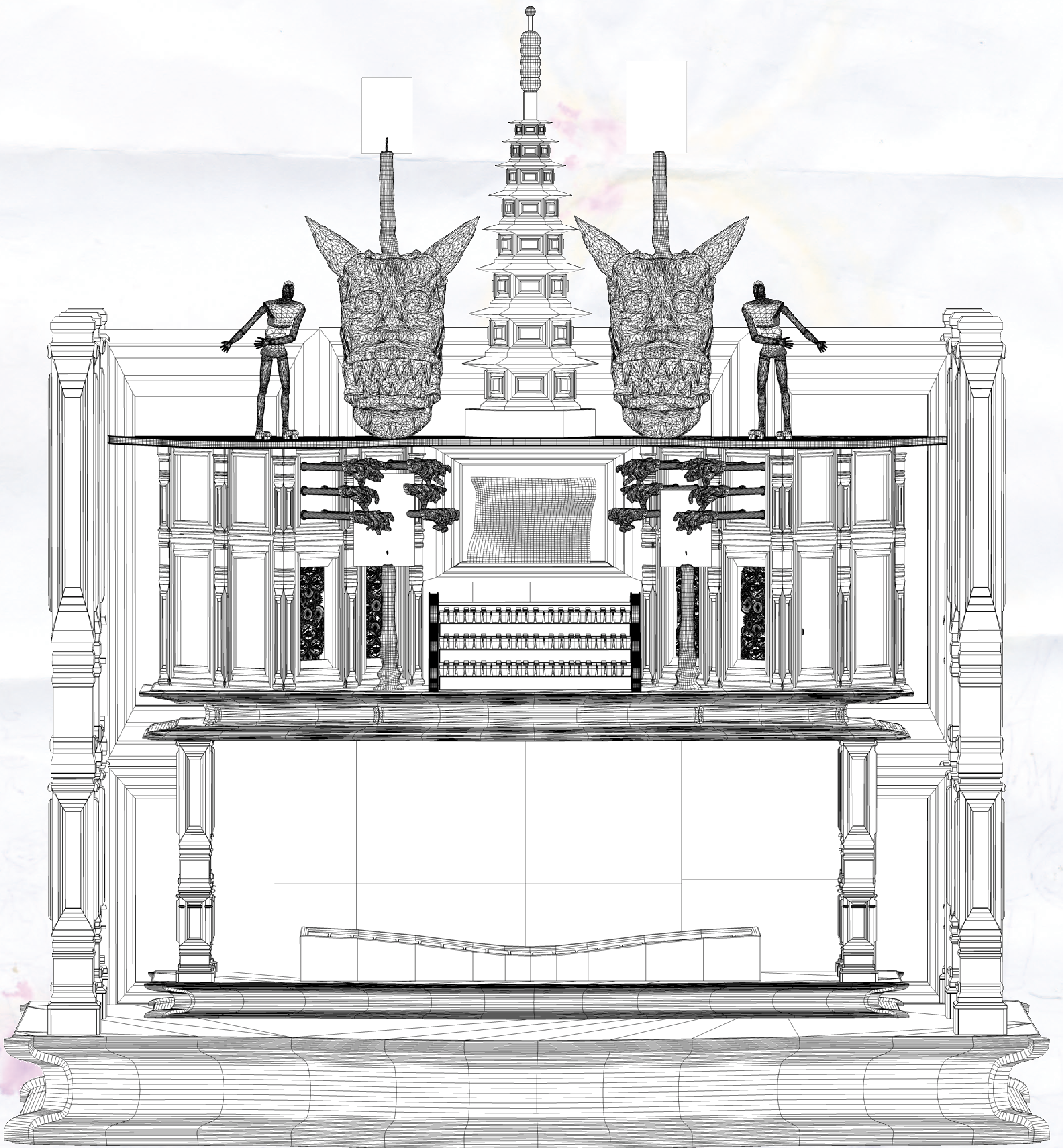
idea that influenced where I went with it. In the end Hell itself was colder, whilst it was surrounded by warm fiery skies. I thought that was the most cruel. Being in a cold lonely place, surrounded by a beautiful warmth you can never feel. One of the things that scares people the most is the truth, having to see their own true face, that is the terrifying power of the mirror. Hence the floor in hell is a mirror.

Technical: Once I had the concept down for this set I just re-used a lot of the elements from the Nether World to construct it, since it is in the Nether World itself. I did create a lot of things just for hell like the Mannequins that are dangling in the air all over the set. I created the dangling animations, baked them to a point cache and then used the cache deformer to duplicate them throughout the scene without using any additional memory. There are also a lot of floating lanterns that I created inspired by luminescent jellyfish. They are animated using vibrate tags and replicated throughout the scene using a Mograph cloner with a random effector. The floor itself is a mirror and I used this to make the set look larger and more detailed than it really is. C4d's renderer is really quick so it didn't add much to the render times. Hell also has a second form that is totally berserk and I hope it doesn't cause too many seizures!

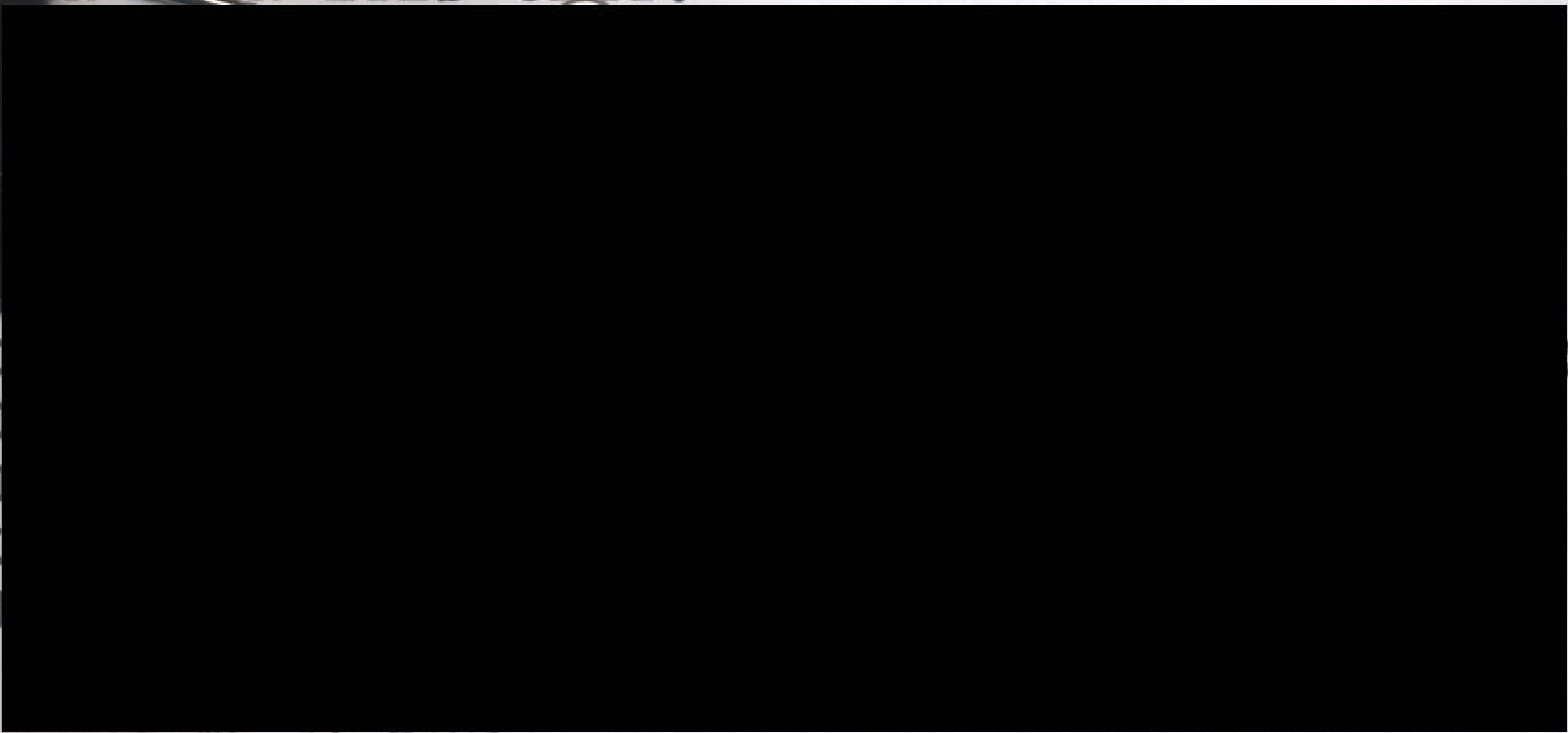


Making your own interpretation of hell is big fun and a great challenge since we've seen so many depictions of it





TOP SECRET!
FOR YOUR EYES ONLY!



Heart String Marionette

by
M dot Strange

"You will die... inside"

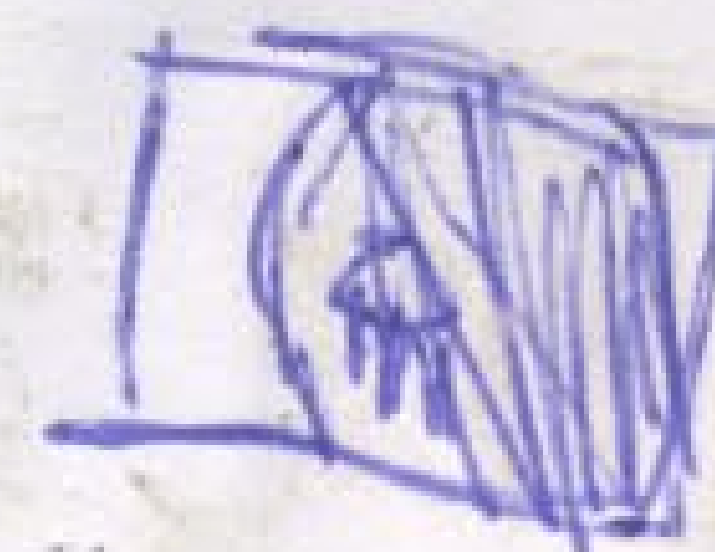
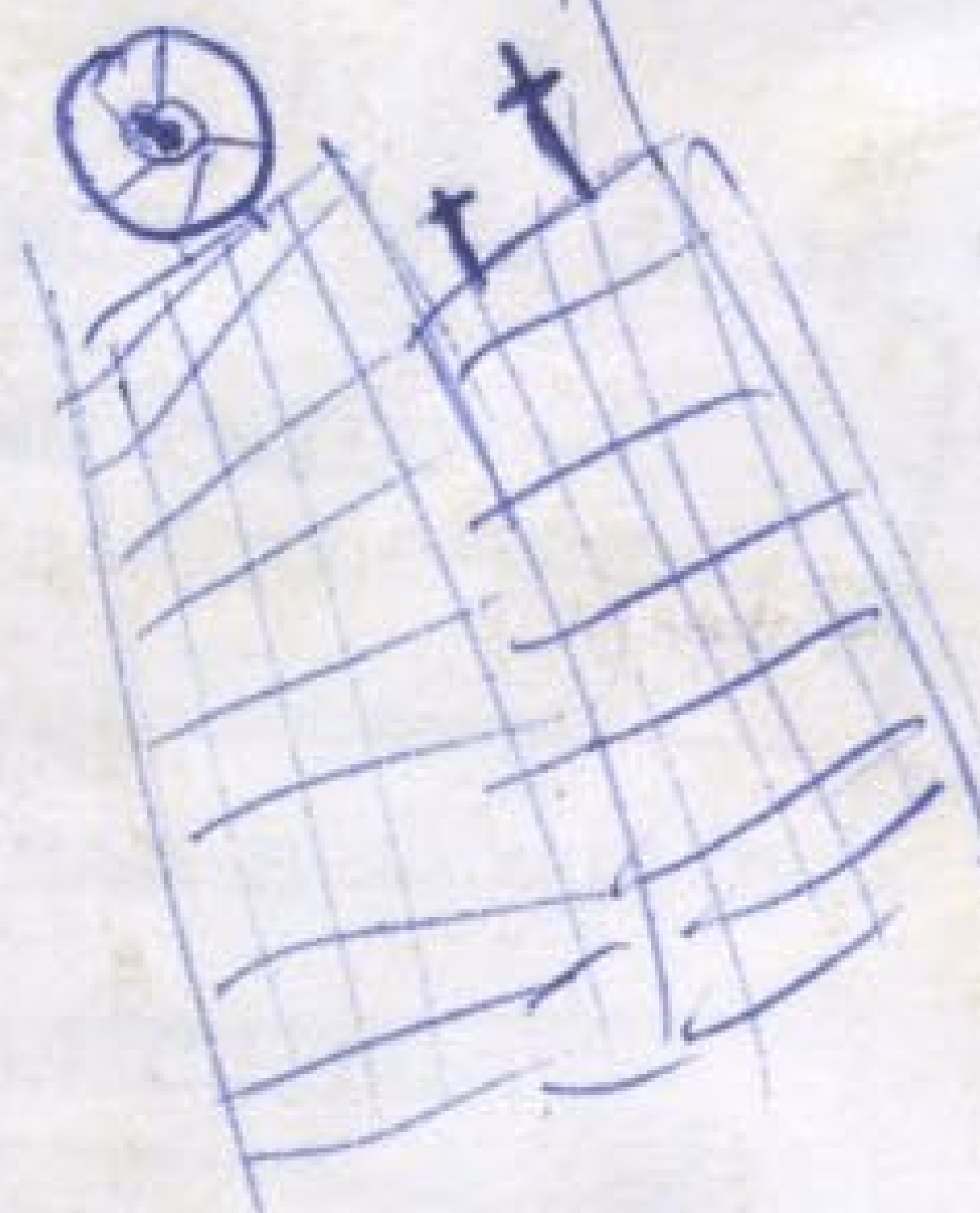
Revision 25
9-27-09

5.5 shot day

167 month 4 wks

33 57

7	14	21	28	35	42	49
8	16	24	32	40	48	56
10	20	30	40	50	60	70



$$\begin{array}{r} 150 \\ + 17 \\ \hline 167 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 150 \\ + 50 \\ \hline 200 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 21 \\ 175 \\ 3 \\ \hline 525 \\ + 500 \\ \hline 1025 \end{array}$$

Jumbo 34.6

CHAPTER 6

Making of Heart String Marionette



Making of: HOW

In this section I'll give you an overview of my production process, as it's a little different from other workflows I've read about.

This is my order of operations when making a film. I'll first discuss mostly technical details and then I'll discuss the "Whys".

Brainstorm: I have a basic idea about what I'm going for with a few ideas for scenes and narrative hooks. I just write everything down and explore all possibilities without making any commitments to anything. At this point I really want to find the ROOT, as I've found there's a film in there that we THINK we want to make and there's another we HAVE to make. So I keep digging around in this brainstorming phase to find the real film buried amongst all the random ideas. In this phase I'll fill up notebooks with ideas and write chunks of narrative, hooks, situations and character ideas down on notecards, so I can flip through them and isolate the ones I like the most. So in this phase I'm trying to create an idea tornado, hoping that one of them will get so strong it will sweep me up and force me into the next phase. When I go into this phase I usually have a few vague ideas for films and maybe even some basic narratives worked out, but I try not to fall in love with any of them as to find the best amongst them. This phase will take a few weeks, as long as it takes to create that narrative typhoon to sweep me away!

Outline: So after choosing a potential path, I then start to find/write the hooks or "epic" points in the film. It's usually the big reversals, shocking moments or battle scenes. I lay these out in linear order and experiment with different situations and different variables. I know that whatever goes on in this phase will most likely change, but my job at this point is to just do my best and push the process forwards. If you've ever seen the way a Katanas is made, it's sort of like that. You keep heating the material, trying to break it down and tear it apart to find the weak spots. Then you fold it over examining it from all angles, while pounding away at it with a skeptic's eye. You keep repeating this process until it's as tight and solid as it's going to be. Until a shot is rendered and finalized, it's still just a blueprint to me and could be changed at any time. So things are very flexible in this outlining phase. At this point I'll write and arrange the basic narrative and read it out in story form to different people to see if it catches and maintains the interest. When reading, or "pitching", your story to a real live, non yes-man person it's easy to see the holes

and weak points in the story, which you then fix before the next pitch. It's like testing out the performance more than it is seeking the person's approval. You can also change your story on the fly whilst pitching and if it gets a good reaction from the person, you can consider it as a change. To me storytelling is storytelling. If you can't tell a good story face to face with another person then you'll never be able to do so in something as complex as an animated film. So I make my story and my hooks work in person before going any further. I used to have a little wacky band and we performed on the streets and in a few clubs here and there and that is INVALUABLE in giving you the ability to READ and PLAY TO an audience. There is a certain rhythm or pace that must be maintained as to not lose people, so I think that kind of public performance is a great exercise for storytellers. I've also been lucky enough to do a fair number of speaking engagements, one was with a crowd of over 2000 people. Those are also great storytelling practice. If you can keep a large audience entertained and interested with nothing more than your words then that can only help you as a filmmaker. Filmmakers have so many CHEATS at their disposal. The over the top emotionally manipulated music, the touching close ups with teary eyes, the best friend/child murdered with parent loved one reaction shot, etc. I believe we have to make it so we can get by WITHOUT these cheats at this outline phase. Don't depend on those cheats that will be coming later! Make your story work in outline form, because if you do it'll be that much MORE POWERFUL when you do turn those cheats on. I think most filmmakers don't really grind as hard as they should in pre-production, they depend on the actors or visual FX artists to bring the MAGIC. It's your job as WRITER to bring the MAGIC to the text, so don't move on from this outline phase unless the MAGIC is there.

Script: Up until this point you've been describing the actions and feelings of the characters, but now you actually get to step inside of them. This can be shocking at first because at this point they have no real thoughts or feelings. This is where you start to think and feel for them, this is where they start to react with each other. When I start out I'm writing what/how I think they are, but usually, halfway through the script, their real character will emerge and I'll

find myself going back to change dialogue because once I KNOW the character I say to myself “They wouldn’t say that!” So throughout the first draft you’re thinking through a character. Then in subsequent drafts you’re feeling through them, hopefully. Before I wrote HSM, I read a TON of screen writing and just general fiction writing books. I had read a few books on writing before HSM, but I had never really studied it in depth. Before HSM I’d written 50-70 short film scripts, a few feature scripts and a fair amount of fiction when I was younger. I never took any writing classes, let alone screenwriting, but after reading most everything I could find about it I’ve come to the conclusion that most all of it is HEARSAY and reverse engineered BULLSHIT. Look at the people who have written the so-called screenwriting “bibles”. What great films have they written? NONE. That’s right, NONE! They’re just trying to make a BUCK. They took some great films and tried to reverse engineer them, tried to second guess the screenwriters after the fact. I looked at all my favorite films and NONE of them followed the rules or credos of the major screenwriting books. So it was good to read them, but I decided to go my own way. I’ve always done what’s felt right and not followed anyone else’s rules and HSM was no different. The script for HSM probably went through about 60-70 revisions, if not more? I revised constantly, until the shot was actually animated and rendered. I view the script as a living thing, so it can evolve and grow throughout the production. To me it’s just a blueprint, something to fall back on. If I come up with a better idea in the storyboarding, animatic or animation phase, I will edit the script accordingly. In its first draft HSM was a radically different film from what it ended up being in the end. There were three main characters who were cut out entirely. HSM started out as a tragic bi-sexual love triangle with monsters! It just had too many characters and too many narrative paths, so I decided to cut out those three and integrate their strongest characteristics or hooks into the remaining characters. So the first draft would have worked better as a mini-series instead of a single two hour film. The other three characters and the Y stories were pretty cliché as well when it comes to Samurai film. They had my own spin on them of course and I liked them, so I’m considering animating their stories and including them on the HSM DVD.

Storyboard: Where the pencil really meets the paper. So now we have the story in text form and hopefully it’s as exciting and as powerful as it can be in WORDS. Hopefully you took your EMOTION and did your best to transmute it into TEXT. Now you turn on your inner visual poet, your master cinematographer/visual storyteller and transmute those WORDS into PICTURES. It’s like you’re still working on the Katana, you’re still heating it, folding it over and pounding it to make it stronger, but now you add the visual layer of interpretation. In computing they have something called Abstraction Layer Theory. I believe the same sort of thing applies to filmmaking.

When I was a kid I wrote a lot of poetry and was very much a fan of playing with and manipulating words. I’ve been rapping since 2002 and I most definitely do enjoy playing with words when writing rhymes or freestyling, but I really feel like visual storytelling is my thing. I read a ton of manga and I think that it is the highest form of visual storytelling that exists today. I’m REALLY crazy about moving images though, so animation is my thing. When it gets to the storyboard phase I really get to have fun. I believe by reading manga, by watching good animation and good film, by being an active thinking photographer you build your visual vocabulary. When I storyboard I don’t think, I FEEL. I don’t think about what I’m trying to portray, I just draw what comes to mind. I’m not trying to come up with “clever shots” as I’m not trying to make clever films. I want to create emotionally authentic and powerful films, so I do less thinking and more feeling. I simply sit down with my storyboard sheets and a pencil, then get to drawing. We are limited in our expressions by our vocabulary when we’re writing and in the same respect we are limited in our expression by our visual vocabulary when we’re storyboarding. If all you know is master shot/shot/reverse shot, you’re not going to be able to express much. You should have your own original authentic way of speaking VISUALLY. You can simply mimic others and copy visual phrases verbatim, stringing together copies, but you’re just using other peoples’ words. You’re doing visual karaoke. It may be fun, but it’s not going to really move anyone.

When storyboarding HSM I went through and, in a linear fashion over the course of a few weeks, storyboarded the whole film, which was about 2300 crappy drawings of mine. THEN as I was about to animate each part of the film, I RE-STORYBOARDED each part. So I storyboarded the whole film twice. I did this to get the best out of it. I had to come up with better visual ideas after storyboarding it the first time AND I was dedicated to getting the best out of

Nether Forest:

- hand trees @phase3 @done
- swords @phase3 @done
- lanterns @phase3 @done
- bleachers @phase3 @done
- swords @phase3 @done
- mannequins @phase3 @done
- controller @phase3 @done
- hed pole @phase3 @done
- landscape @phase3 @done
- bridge @phase3 @done
- pillars @phase3 @done
- wires @phase3

H8den
Scenes in C4D

Silent - make next work shortcuts
Sculpt in Zbrush

A completed construction list

Forest +CLIFF:

- bamboo @phase3 @done
- trees @phase3 @done
- flags @phase3 @done
- Grasses @phase3 @done
- Landscape @phase3
- Pointing fingers @phase3 @done
- Arms @phase3 @done
- Cliff @phase3 @done
- Path @phase3
- Lanterns @phase3 @done
- Grass @phase3 @done
- Hills @phase3
- Group of trees on plane
- Bamboo group on plane

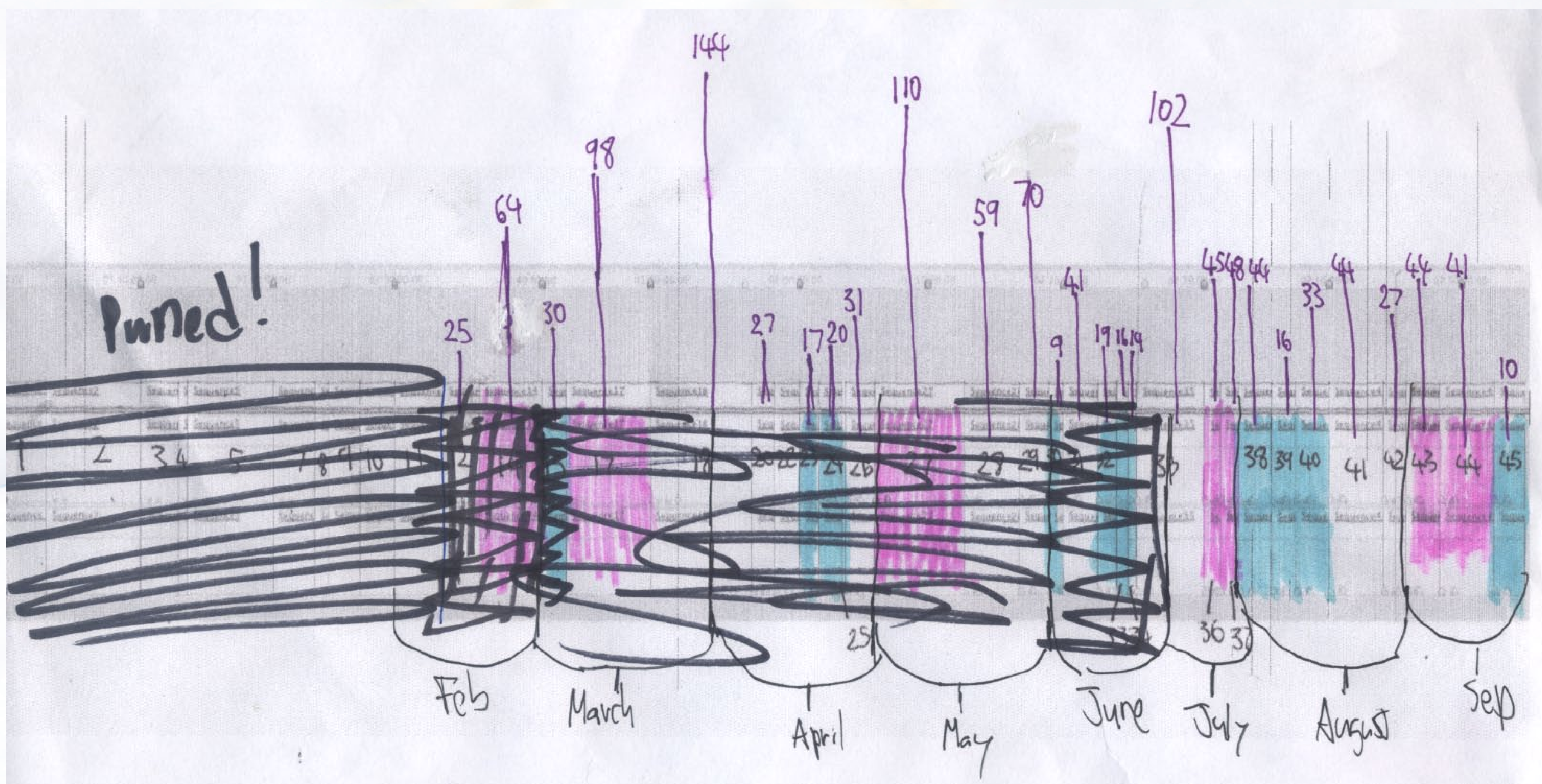
Campfire:

- fire @phase3 @done
- Curved bamboo @phase3 @done

River:

- Plants @phase3 @done
- Water candles @phase3 @done
- Bridge @phase3 @done

A completed storyboard take note of the photo-realism!



A schedule with the # of shots in purple for each sequence: color coded for difficulty. Pink for difficult and blue for easy

it. It was kinda funny too because after storyboarding the film the first time I had those storyboards velo-bound, like they were going to be the final visual bible or something. Little did I know that I was going to redo it all! I want no idle time when making a film. I use every second of my time to make the film better because I know you can't re-storyboard anything after it's done. So once I have the final storyboards, which I draw on templates I found by googling "storyboard wide" I then scan them in and use a Photoshop action to isolate them so I have a different png file for every frame. I import these png files into my NLE to create the animatic.

Animatic: If ya ask me, when you make the animatic you ARE MAKING the film. It has imagery, dialogue and music. If what you want to happen isn't happening in the animatic, it's NOT going to happen in the final film no matter how awesome your visual FX are or how hawT yer actors are or how famous your voice actors are. Don't wait for someone or something else to bring the magic to the film, it's YOUR JOB to make the magic before anyone else shows up! It's easy to make a lot of excuses as to why the animatic is boring, but DON'T. Keep making changes until the animatic has the power and the magic. Even with my crappy drawings and cheesy temp voices the HSM animatic was epic to me. The emotion and drama is THERE, so anything added is just going to shine the diamond within. Your idea starts as coal in the brainstorming phase and through your constant pressure on it the diamond inside should be shining by the end of the script-writing phase. You should be shining that diamond all the way to the end! If you still have a lump of coal in the animatic phase, you need to go back as you didn't choose the right piece of carbon. With HSM I recorded all the temp voices for both the animatic and for the lip sync. So I had to act out every single character for the whole film. This REALLY gets you inside of your characters and the film. Expect massive edits to follow. I remember back before I made WATS I showed my brother the WATS animatic and he was laughing so hard, he was like "Just put this out! This is great!" It was funny because it was like these grand scenes, but rendered with my crappy

drawings and me doing women's voices. Yet I could still see the potential, so I followed it!

The animatic phase is when TIME is introduced into the process and you get to play with tension/suspense. This is the first edit of the film. So, as rough as it might be, take it SERIOUSLY! One of the advantages of editing the animatic is that it's easy to kill babies, if you're familiar with the popular term by Walter Murch. Since you just have rough drawings, instead of shiny 3d renders, you don't fall in love with the images. I've had this problem in the past. When you make everything yourself you're proud of yourself for just doing it, so you have a tendency to hold shiny shots way too long. Even including most them is probably an error IF they don't serve the story/mood. It's easy to be a merciless editor in the animatic phase, which I think is the advantage of doing animatics in the first place. You save production time, you save render time and you save your film from being a mediocre bore-fest that only appeals to other 3d artists as a really long demo reel.

Construction: Inventory: Once the animatic is done I sit down and watch the animatic with a pad an paper and I make lists of all the things that I need to make for the film. I break it into four categories: Characters, props, sets and special FX. Having the animatic you now know what the camera will see, so you only add things to your list that will actually be seen by the camera. You also know how far you have to build the sets out. If the camera never goes behind a set, then you don't have to build that! So you're only going to model what you need to model! ALSO by having the animatic you know what objects will need to be functional and which ones are just for looks. It makes a big difference when modeling whether an object is functional or not, so this can save you a lot of time in the end. I haven't seen this described as a discrete stage in most productions, as it's usually lumped in with general pre-production. It's kind of depressing when you start this phase because you look at your list and depending on the grandiosity of your film it can be quite a lot! I had pages upon pages of things to model! It seemed a bit overwhelming at first, but then I broke it down like I do with everything and I just had to model 4-5 objects every day for a month or three.

Construction: Concept art: Now that I know what needs to be modeled, I sit down with my sketchbook and a pencil and systematically draw each of the objects. The first versions are usually not very inspiring so I continue to refine them. I was a bit surprised

at how many of the initial concept drawings led to final models though. I end up drawing the main characters the most, as their look is the most important to me and they will be on screen most of the time. Strangely enough I only had to draw the sets once. I drew them once and those were the concepts used for what ended up being the final sets. The only characters that went through MANY iterations were Samhaine, The Body and The Strange Children, everything else stayed on course, for the most part, from the very first concept drawings. I'm not a skilled draftsman, but I'm able to get my design points across to myself and that's what's important, since I'm modeling it all. I drew a ton of references of the Masks, but didn't use any of them. I think I kind of channeled the Masks. Of course I was heavily inspired by Noh Masks, but what puzzled me after looking through tons of books and literature about Noh is that the same Noh Mask archetypes are still in use. Zeami used these specific styled mask archetypes and they stayed that way. I do like the Noh Masks as they are, but I decided that if I was going to have a go at it I'd like to create my own looks for the Noh archetypes. My own demons, old man, old woman, etc. To make the Masks I just sculpted them with no(h) thoughts in my mind for 17 days or so in a row, then I attached the Masks to the matching archetypes and characters. I printed images of all the masks I had sculpted then I assigned an archetype to each one and that is how all the characters came to be. Having the characters constructed as actual wooden Marionettes didn't come through in the concept art phase, that came in the rigging phase. I wasn't really thinking about poly counts and how I was going to rig the characters when doing the concept art. It was more about the style, the iconic values. I was always just OK with the character design UNTIL I decided to make them all be constructed as wooden Marionettes. That was the "AHA!" moment where it clicked and all came together. Once I did that, all the designs I thought were just ok really popped and worked. So I went through and drew all the objects with my modeling capabilities in mind. I'm not the greatest modeler in the world, nor do I want to be, and I didn't want to add unneeded detail to a model just because I could. I like the minimalist approach. I want the most powerful visual statement I can make with the simplest design. So I decided to bank everything on the Masks. I would have fairly simplistic, low poly bodies with very detailed, striking Masks. As we are looking at a character's face most of the time I thought this was the best strategy, ESPECIALLY given the influence of NOH in HSM. So in the end I went with template-based, low poly bodies, using unique textures to differentiate them and

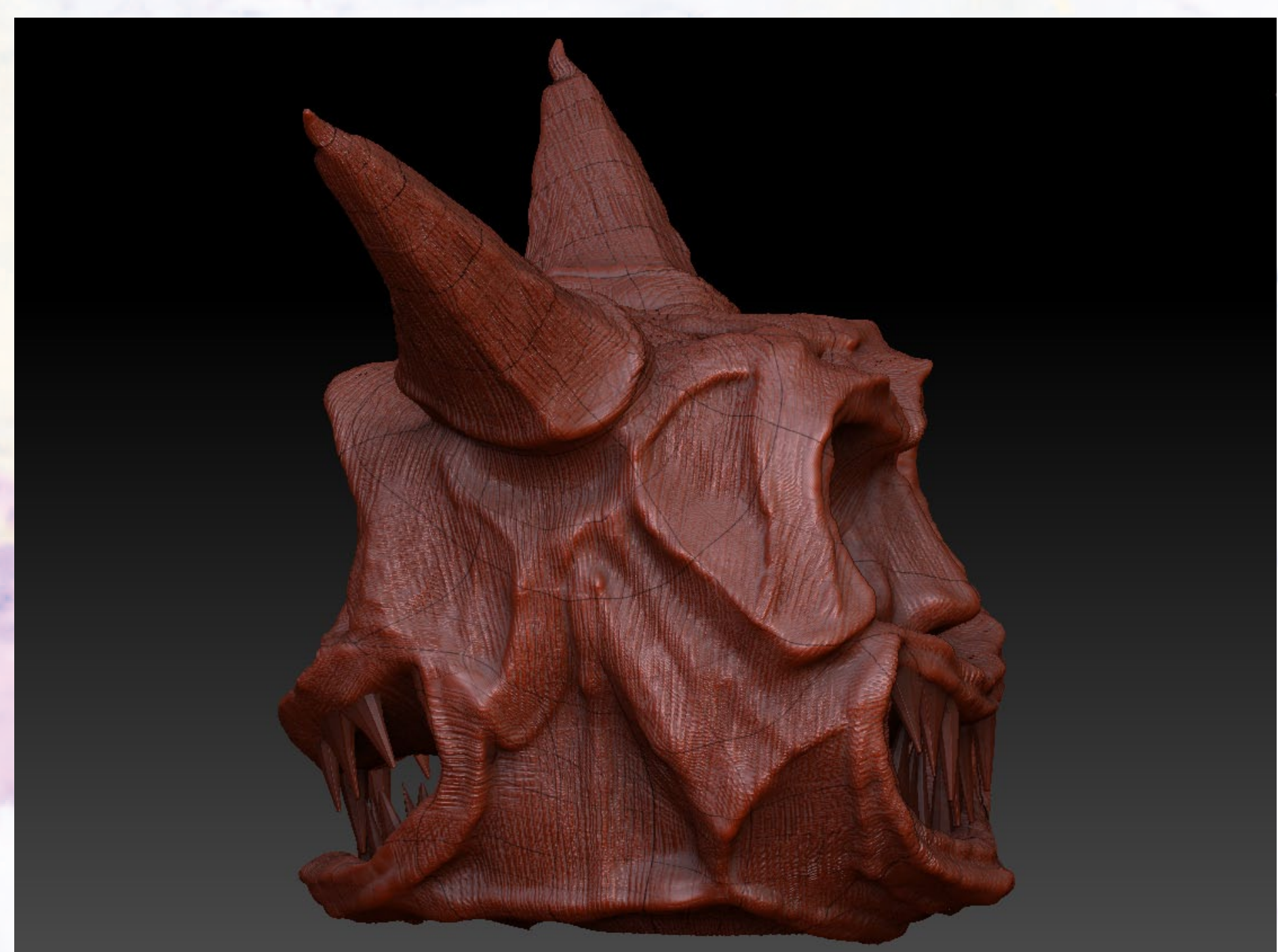
high poly detailed unique faces.

My approach to the design was this: Only use wood, stone, paper, metal and flesh and design things as if I was going to make them for a real stop motion film. So I wanted gritty, hand made, unique artifacts. I wanted characters that would leave people on the fence so they couldn't figure out by looking at them if they were "good" or "bad" I didn't want overly ornate things, I wanted the simple elegance of traditional Japanese design with the rawness and roughness of old school stopmo puppet films. I wanted Ninja Scroll taking place in a stopmotion Silent Hill. That's what I was going for. The final look is NOT EXACTLY what I was going for, it's actually BETTER than what I wanted and totally unique.

Construction: Modeling: Once the construction list is finished I move on to modeling it all. This was the first project I had ever used Zbrush on and I can say now that without Zbrush I would not have been able to make HSM! I had always struggled with organic modeling and that's what Zbrush was made to do. Zbrush is a much more natural and easy way for me to create 3d objects, so I tried to use it as much as possible. When modeling objects I would always try to do it with Zbrush first. I used Zspheres extensively and I found them really intuitive and fast. So if you're struggling with traditional poly modeling techniques give Zbrush, Sulptiris or Mudbox a try. All the Masks, Monsters and many of the objects in the film were made in Zbrush, with further additions and textures done with Cinema 4d and its Bodypaint module. I wanted a handmade look to the objects in this film and when combining objects sculpted in Zbrush with an Intuos by hand, then painting the same objects "by hand" in Bodypaint, you really get the rough imperfections that I love about real handmade objects. I only used "real" textures, as well. That is to say things like wood, metal, paper and flesh, most of which I made by scanning real objects or taking photos of them which I later Photoshopped. Actually the Monster skins used in the film came from the skins of the real stopmotion puppets from WATS. The stopmo monsters in WATS were made by painting layers of liquid latex over the armatures and painting them. Since the WATS monsters are at the bottom of a box next to my bed I just scanned them in and then tiled the texture samples with Photoshop. After that I brought those tiled textures into Cra-



Some of my raw Zbrush sculpts



zybump and created displacement, normal, bump and diffusion maps out of them and applied them to the 3d Monsters in HSM. This pushed the handmade look even further. I use 3d animation because I have no other affordable way of realizing my big ideas, but you could say that with HSM I approached it as if I was making an epic stopmotion film. That's how I wanted it to look, so I modeled and textured things accordingly. The paper mache/damaged, old, painted wood look of most of the characters came through in much of the same way. My lovely assistant found an old French book about Marionettes and mailed it to me. It had these awesome old black and white photos of Marionettes used in Puppet Shows from the 1950s, so I scanned the more detailed photos and used Photoshop and Crazybump to capture the 3d textures of those old Marionettes. I then applied the displacement/bump/normal map to my "handmade" 3d Marionettes. When painting the textures on my characters with Bodypaint's projection mode I made sure to be rough and messy. I can't stand the shiny perfect look of a lot of popular 3d animation. It doesn't have enough grit or texture for my liking. It's lacking the imperfection and grime that make real objects unique artifacts. I wanted my models to look like they were made by hand in Prague or in a Toho Kaiju workshop, not like plastic toys made on a Chinese assembly line.

For the buildings and other objects that had repetitive structures I used Cinema 4d's Mograph module. It allows you to build, replicate and offset intricate structures really quickly, so I leveraged its power whenever possible. Mograph really puts a lot of power in a single artist's hands and EVERYTHING you make with it is live and procedural. So anything you make with Mograph, like a bridge or a gate, can be modified at any time or destroyed with all of its separate pieces becoming dynamic. I also used Mograph for my poor man's massive, but I'll discuss that in the animation section. I don't know the exact number, but I probably modeled around 200 different objects for HSM. I used Cinema 4d's content browser to manage and organize all of them. I kept the objects in several categories in the

content browser: Characters, Masks, props, interior objects, Sets, exterior objects, other/special FX.

Layout: Once everything has been modeled, in the construction phase my job is to lay it all out. To put the sets together and fill them all out with props and the like. Again, this is all based on the animatic as I know from what angle each set will be photographed from, so I keep this in mind when laying out the sets. I fill out the sets in the layout phase. So I'll have hills, stones and trees as separate objects which I put together in the layout phase. I focus on the areas where the action takes place, adding the most detail there and filling out the rest. There were a few C4d plugins that sped up the process a lot. One of them was the Paint on Surface plugin. With this plugin you can take an object, or a hierarchy of objects, and paint them onto the surface of geometry, for example trees, and rocks on a hillside or books and debris on the ground. The plugin can randomize the position/rotation/scale for greater realism. I also used the Surface Spread plugin as this plugin was made to populate landscapes with objects and you can even make your hills/mountains with it. So you would model your trees and rocks, etc. and then use Surface Spread to randomly place them on your landscape, with tons of controls to randomize the look or control the dispersion of said objects based on altitude and a number of other variables. So I was able to fill out the sets rather quickly. Of course I had to also place many of the objects by hand for greater precision. With my concept art and the animatic as a guide it was a quick process. As I'm going through the layout process I'm constantly checking angles and setups by looking for various 3d cameras in the scene. I tend to use only 10mm, 15mm, 24mm, 50mm, 80mm and 300mm lenses when setting up shots. So I check the sets in progress with the common lenses to make sure things are as they should be, but, since I have ultimate control of the sets in the 3d, if there is a problem where-in something doesn't fit or work out as it should I just move walls or whatever else it takes to make the shot work.

When laying the sets out I fill out and detail the parts of the scene that will be featured in most of the shots, then I expand them and detail the far off regions. If it's not too much trouble I'll go ahead and fill out the entire set, all the way around. I've had some ideas about releasing the sets as explorable 3d environments, so they'll have to be complete to do that. When I was laying the sets out I had the temptation to light them as well, but I've learned that I work better when I focus on a specific task all the way through, rather than constantly shifting gears. So I went through and laid out all the sets for the whole film, then made lighting a separate work pass. To me filmmaking is a simple process of breaking down complex processes into smaller more manageable ones, making quotas and just grinding every day to complete the tasks

you need to do. In the past I didn't have separate modeling, layout, and lighting phases, so my productions were much less efficient. Your sets and geometry can take on an entirely different appearance when lit, but again I don't want to have to lean on a later process and settle for mediocrity in the current phase, so I make sure I grind until whatever I'm working on is at its best for that phase. To be this thorough with each phase you really just need more time. When you're working on your own, with no definite deadlines but your own internal ones, I think you should take as much time as you need to really get the best out of the current phase, WHILST staying on a moderately aggressive schedule so you don't take ten years to complete the project.

Lighting: Something else I learned with the HSM production was not to try to color the sets until I got to the lighting phase, so with the set design and character design I limited the color palettes, keeping it mostly grayscale through using a lot of desaturation. So when creating the characters and props and laying out the sets it was kinda discouraging because everything was so grey, lacking color and vitality. I learned this was the best thing I could have done, since there weren't any colors on the objects to screw up the lighting color schemes, I could use colored lights to color the sets and the scenes. I guess it's sort of like a theater approach wherein they use their multicolored lights to color the sets and add mood. So by the time I got to the lighting phase I could set the color scheme with no interference from the sets and characters. My approach to the lighting was to only use natural light. I wanted to make it so the only lighting sources in the film would be the moon, flames and candles. As such I had these mostly greyscale sets that I would color with blue, reddish orange and yellow lights. It's really simple yet I was making things overly complex in the past by coloring my characters and sets, so by the time I got to lighting the colors in the lights fought with the colors in the characters and sets, which led to a lot of muddiness OR the need to lay a certain hue over the whole image to force things to comply. This approach worked in my earlier works, but I wanted a more elegant and refined look with HSM.

When I lit the sets I started with darkness, of course, then I would add in the main hard light sources in the scene, usually in the form of fire or candles. I used a mixture of volumetric and visible lights. Then I added a little Xpresso to make the lights flicker at different rates to simulate real flames. So in the setups I would have a volumetric omni and several non-visible

spot lights to give me greater control over the illumination of the key objects in the scene. So it's like I was doing my own virtual GI, setting up my own bounces and the like. I believe that REAL MEN DON'T USE GI! GI looks great, but it's less of the artist and more of the algorithms. Since I'm trying to create UNIQUE work in every way and stand out from the rest, I stay away from tools and techniques that don't really rely on a human artist's skill and ability. Certain renderers' GI have their own look and I want MY OWN LOOK, so I stay away from automated solutions so I can stand out in every way possible.

The role of lighting is to frame the set and the important objects in the set and to color the scene, adding the mood and atmosphere. For the atmosphere I create several huge atmospheric spot lights with animated noise in their visibility and criss crossed them in the background of the sets to create layers of foggy looking light, receding into the backgrounds. Fog is something that's really tough to do right in 3d while keeping render times reasonable. I experimented with a few different ways before finalizing my technique. I ended using a mix of volumetric lights in the 3d scene, with layers of real fog added in post using a depth pass as a track matte. Cinema 4d's visible lights can go a long way toward getting realistic fog with low render times, but I found the touches that really sold the look came in the compositing phase.

I have a fair amount of experience lighting sets in the real world from my stopmotion and live action experience. I always sort of knew what I wanted with my lighting setups when doing stopmotion, but was never really able to get with the lack of control in real life. Light leakage, light pollution, things like that can screw things up, but in 3d you have TOTAL control and can even make it so lights only illuminate specific objects or nothing at all. So I used these "hacks" to get the looks I wanted in every set. It was almost like magic! I was so used to have my lighting turn into a muddy mess, but with this new approach most of it looked pretty great in 3d, although I did heavily tweak and enhance the lighting in the compositing phase. When all the set lighting was finished I rendered out fly-throughs of all the sets to make sure there wasn't any funny business with the lighting/textures. That's when I learned that like an idiot I set most all of the texture interpolation to "alias" which looks fine for still frames, which I had been working with up to this point, but causes flickering when ani-

mated. So I had to go through pretty much every texture used and switch them over to “mip”.

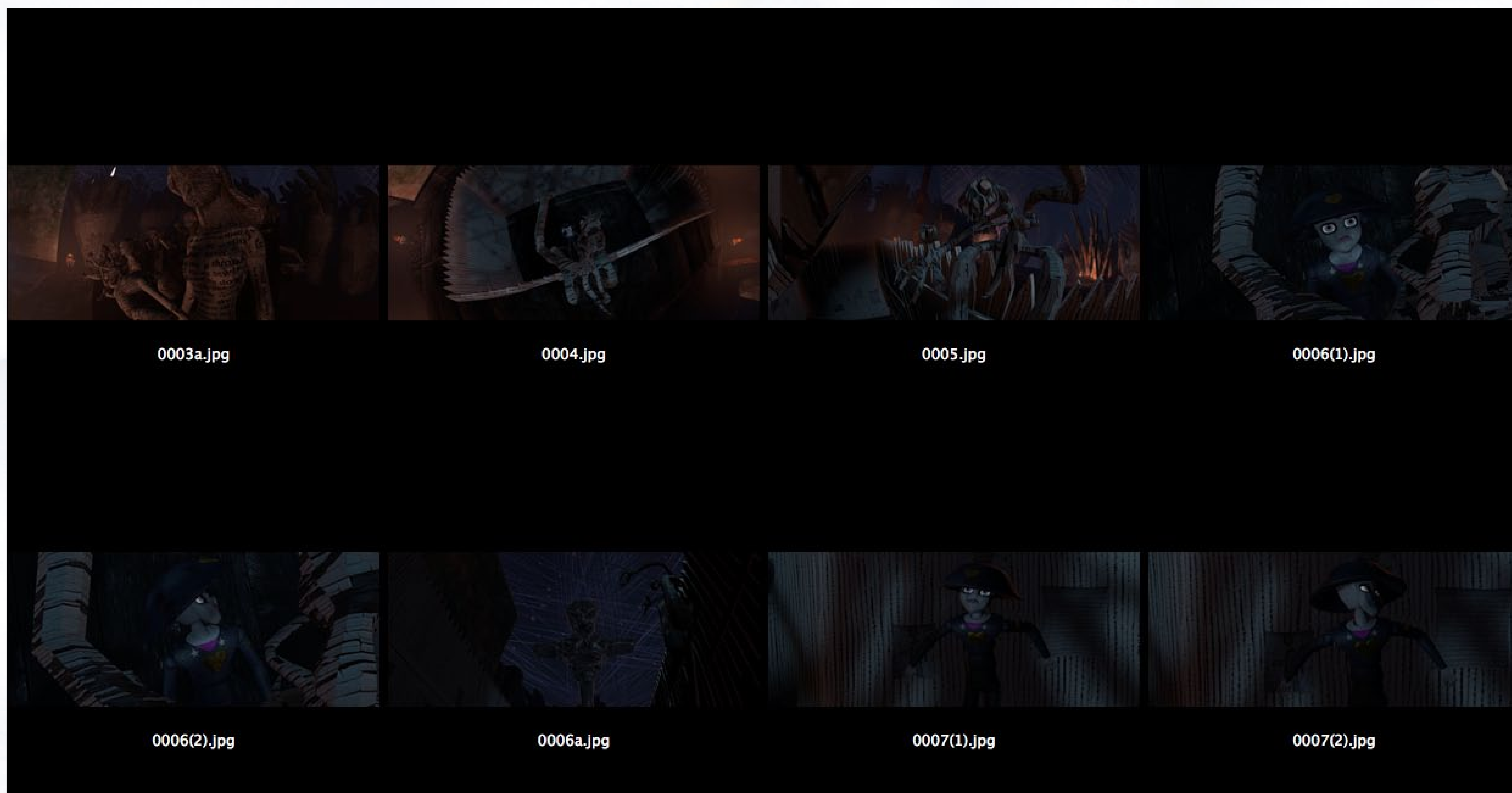
Character rigging/skinning: So after all the sets were lit and finalized I took a 2 week vacation, but my job on this “vacation” was to create the master rig for all the characters. I never really understood the process of rigging/skinning and my past rigs had been rubbish. I was lucky whenever they worked, but most of the time they didn’t and they had severely limited range of motion because of my clueless, crappy setup. This time I was determined to truly understand the process and make a good solid and light rig. I used the Cactus Dan Pro Character bundle for my rigging/skinning/morphs and LUCKY FOR ME Cactus Dan created a free 4 hour video tutorial series on how to rig with his tools. So I took my laptop and these tutorials with me on vacation, DETERMINED to not settle for a rig I didn’t know how to use. So I sat down with my notebook and watched his tutorials and took notes and after about a week I had made the best rig I had ever made in my life! It became the master rig for all the characters in HSM. I never saw the point of creating a unique rig for each character?! If I had one good stable rig, why not use that for all of them? So that’s what I did. I wanted the FEWEST amount of controls I could have on my rig. I wasn’t out to make the most amazing animation ever and I didn’t want it all exaggerated and cartoony either, I wanted them to move like real Marionettes. This allowed my rig to be really fast and easy to animate and since I used the same one for the whole film, I quickly learned its quirks if any and was able to animate really fast. Another advantage of using the same rig for all the characters was that I could utilize Cinema 4d’s motion clip system, sharing clips between all the characters.

After I finished the rig I skinned one to the Samhaine character. This was the early version of Samhaine, wherein his whole body was the same mesh. I wanted a rough low poly look, so the model was rough and low poly. It looked ok when still, but I learned some things when trying to skin it. I found that the limbs didn’t articulate properly without me adding more loops, which increased the poly count, which slowed

the rig down. It also brought another problem to light for me. I had textured them and envisioned them as being made out of wood, but wood doesn’t bend that much, so it was wrong in more ways than one. So then I got the idea to go with segmented characters. I went and grabbed a bunch of reference photos, I even got an old woodworking book from the 50s off of ebay as it had detailed instructions on how to construct a real segmented wooden Marionette. I also found an old wooden Pinocchio Puppet design that the animators made as a reference for themselves when making that film. I took all my reference and studied a few different ways wooden Marionettes were constructed. I made three different prototypes based on three different real Marionette designs, one of which can be seen as the automaton that walks through a few scenes in the film. I liked the look of that one, but thought it would cause too many problems when swinging swords and the like. I thought a ball joint design would be the best. So the ball joint design I made ended up being the one I used.

Another advantage to the segmented body design was that I wouldn’t have to skin anything, so that meant faster feedback when animating the character, no surprise bad deformations. I used constraints to attach the segmented body parts to the rig. The great part about this is that you can easily adjust the placement of the parts and even swap the parts out. For the Monsters that didn’t have segmented bodies that I could attach via constraints, I just scaled up the master rig to fit the Monster’s body parts and then skinned the mesh. Having the skeleton pre-rigged saves so much time when skinning it and you know the rig works, so you won’t get any ruined geometry from flipped poles and things like that. Much to my surprise after making this master rig the process of rigging/skinning was really fast and easy on HSM.

Animation: For some reason animation always terrifies me when I first start out on a project, especially a feature length project. I do love animation, but I see myself more as a “director” that animates, rather than an “animator” that directs. So again, I do love and appreciate the art of animation very much, but when doing everything myself I can’t spend as much time animating a shot compared to someone who is just working as an animator. So I have a sort of inferiority complex when it comes to animating. On HSM I was able to shake it because on the few shots that I spent a lot of time on I was surprised with the high quality I was able to produce. Having said that I treat my projects more like live action than conventional 3d anima-



Adobe Bridge window with stills rendered from completed shots: Its like a post storyboard

tion. I treat animation like a medium, NOT a genre. I don't watch animated films because everything is SO ANIMATED for no real reason other than to call attention to itself. I've watched all the animation I could find so I'm not very interested in technique alone, I'm looking for something more.

To get over my innate fear of not being good enough when animating I took a month just to practice with a basic soldier character so I could get used to the rig and feel out the style I was to produce the film in. My initial thought was to mimic the stopmotion process and use only hold keyframes. After doing some tests with this straight ahead, zero interpolation style I thought that it would probably get annoying after awhile so I abandoned it, EXCEPT for a few instances with Samhaine. I was also very interested in getting a jittery organic look, without having to manually key every IK controller on every frame or two. I tried a few different things, like animating a shot with hold keys, then using C4d's mouse mocap "Cappuchino" tool to add organic random motion, but it was too chaotic. What I ended up doing was animating the characters with normal spline interpolation, then adding vibrate tags with really low settings for a little random organic motion. You can really see this technique at work with the Kid character or whenever a character is supposed to be scared. I kept testing different techniques throughout the month until I settled on something that

looked good and was relatively quick work as well. I'll share some of those early tests and clips on the HSM DVD.

I used pose 2 pose animation for most all of the film, with straight ahead styles during action shots. Swordplay especially seems to benefit from FK and straight ahead animation. I tried to use motion clips whenever I could, especially with repetitive movements like walks and runs. During my month of animation practice I went through each character and created theY runs and walks, then saved them as motion clips and I actually used many of them in the film. None of the walk or run cycles were perfect, but I don't watch films for their great run/walk cycles as it's just something that's required to get a character from point A to point B and if we don't have to see that at all, all the better.

Since I started with stopmotion animation I had to adjust to 3d animation. I'm not saying I was the greatest stopmotion animator, because I'm not. I just did enough to tell my story. But when you're used to doing stopmotion I've found that you learn the FEEL of certain movements, like when animating a run cycle you know the feel of how the knee whips through and locks when the foot makes contact with the floor. None of this "feel" comes over to 3d animation because you have to know how a certain motion LOOKS. I think the transition from 2d animation to 3d animation would be much more natural. In the end I love 3d animation more than stopmotion with its blasted gravity and flicker-

ing lights and shadows?! Timing is timing though and the more of any type of animation you do helps your sense of timing.

So when animating shots for HSM I would first bring the characters into the scene and pose them wherever they would be for most of the shot. Then I would set the camera up and animate it if it was moving through the shot. Animating the camera first can save time because your character might be out of shot for an amount of time, so why animate them when they are not visible? Once the camera is animated, I then animate the first character if there is more than one in the shot. I will then animate the second, third, etc. Once the shot is animated I will then do a test render to test the lighting and I usually have to add some additional lights to highlight or frame the character in a better way. My approach to this would be to simply find any nearby “physical” lights in the scene, so torches, candles, etc. then duplicate or create a spot light based on it’s lights and point them at the character as a key light, then I would create a bluish moon to act as a fill or backlight. Once the shot was looking good I’d setup the depth of field buffer I wanted. I use the plugin Z-Blur for Cinema 4d, as it gives good visual feedback and lots of additional controls for depth passes, which I used for much more than DOF blurring when I got to the compositing phase. Once a shot was finished I’d send it off to the render server and work on the next. Something that helped me a lot with the visual flow of the film was that whenever a shot was finished I would render a still from it and add it to an album in Adobe Bridge. It was like an after the fact storyboard, so I had stills for every shot in the film as I built it. They were numbered to match the shots, so later in the film if I wanted to reuse an animation, set or asset I would just go into Bridge and look through the sequences and find the shot I wanted. I would then just open the Cinema 4d file for that shot and get what I needed out of that. I used the sequence method to organize everything. Here’s some shots of my 3d project file and 3d render folders:

A lot of people ask me about my workflow when

animating or for some organizational tips. Well with this making of section I’m showing you my order of operations. As far as breaking work down my approach is simple. I make my films in linear order. I figure that I’m going to get better as I go on and the quality of the film should get better as you go further, so I think that’s a good thing. As far as getting shots done, all I do is count the number of shots there is to do based on the animatic/storyboard. Then I estimate, based on past experience and render tests with the new sets/characters, how many shots I’m able to complete in a day. For HSM I looked at the last month of production for WATS. It was mostly all 3d and probably the highest quality stuff in the film and I did about 240 shots in one month, so I knew I could do 150-200 shots a month without dying, whilst keeping a decent level of quality and reasonable render times. So I just create daily quotas and fight to stay with them. Once the quotas are created, it’s just a daily war between me and them. Some days I can barely reach them, some days I do 3-4x the quota. I think the most shots I did in a month for HSM was about 220 sometime in the middle of production. It’s a pretty simple approach. Just figure out how long you want to spend in production then divide that by the number of shots and that’s what you have to do a day. Use your past production experience and recent tests as reference then GO TO WAR!

Rendering: There was no separate rendering phase as I rendered as I went along. So as I finished animating a shot I sent it off to render as my little render farm ran 24/7 and was able to keep up with my output. To make editing simpler and more manageable I broke the film into 45 sequences based on location changes. So as soon as I finished animating a sequence and the 3d renders were done, I would import the 3d renders into After Effects and render out quicktime movies. If there were any errors I would fix them and re-render them, then once they were all fixed I would move on. These render fixes were minor so I would complete them all in a day or two, which is the time I gave myself anyway in between sequence to re-storyboard and prep for the next sequence. So at the start of a month I would re-storyboard the sequences that were to be done that month as well as create any additional 3d props that I added in during the new storyboards. I would record the temp voiceovers required for lip sync in that sequence as well. I would then be ready to work. I rendered to EXR sequences at 1920x802 24fps. For most shots I only rendered out an RGBA pass and a depth pass. Some special FX needed object buffers as well and whenever I had something important in the foreground, that was going to be out of focus in front of something that was in focus, I had to render out separate foreground and background layers as post DOF has its limitations

when it comes to that. If I was going to do it again I would have rendered out material luminance and visible light as separate passes as well. I didn't do this at first as pass management was a pain because C4d can't render multilayer EXRs and I hadn't discovered the great Immigration script for After Effects at that point. Now that I use Immigration having a ton of passes doesn't make project/file management any more complicated or time consuming.

I didn't tweak out over minor render problems like texture flicker on objects in the background as I knew I was going to add noise/grain and layers of dust in the compositing phase. I know some 3d artists go nuts over all these minor artifacts, but I believe that if your average viewer even notices that stuff then you failed in your job as a filmmaker because the story, mood and characters should be occupying their attention.

Compositing: I did all the compositing in Adobe After Effects Cs5. One of the great things you get when working with Cinema 4d and After Effects is the amazing integration between the two. For every C4d render, you can render out an After Effects project that contains your 3d camera, lights and even 3d nulls for objects you choose. I choose to do my skies in the compositing phase as I have greater control over the look of the atmosphere, so for very shot that needed a sky I added a spot light with its intensity set to %0. It had a "look at camera" expression on it and I positioned it in the background of the scene where the sky would be. So then in After Effects all I had to do was replace that light with my matte painting and the sky/clouds, etc. were locked into the shot. I did my best and would not stop tweaking with my 3d renders until I thought they looked awesome straight out of the 3d render. After comping a few of these shots I realized that what I thought was "awesome" out of the 3d render looked like crap compared to the final image after I tweaked it in After Effects. This was an exciting discovery to make!

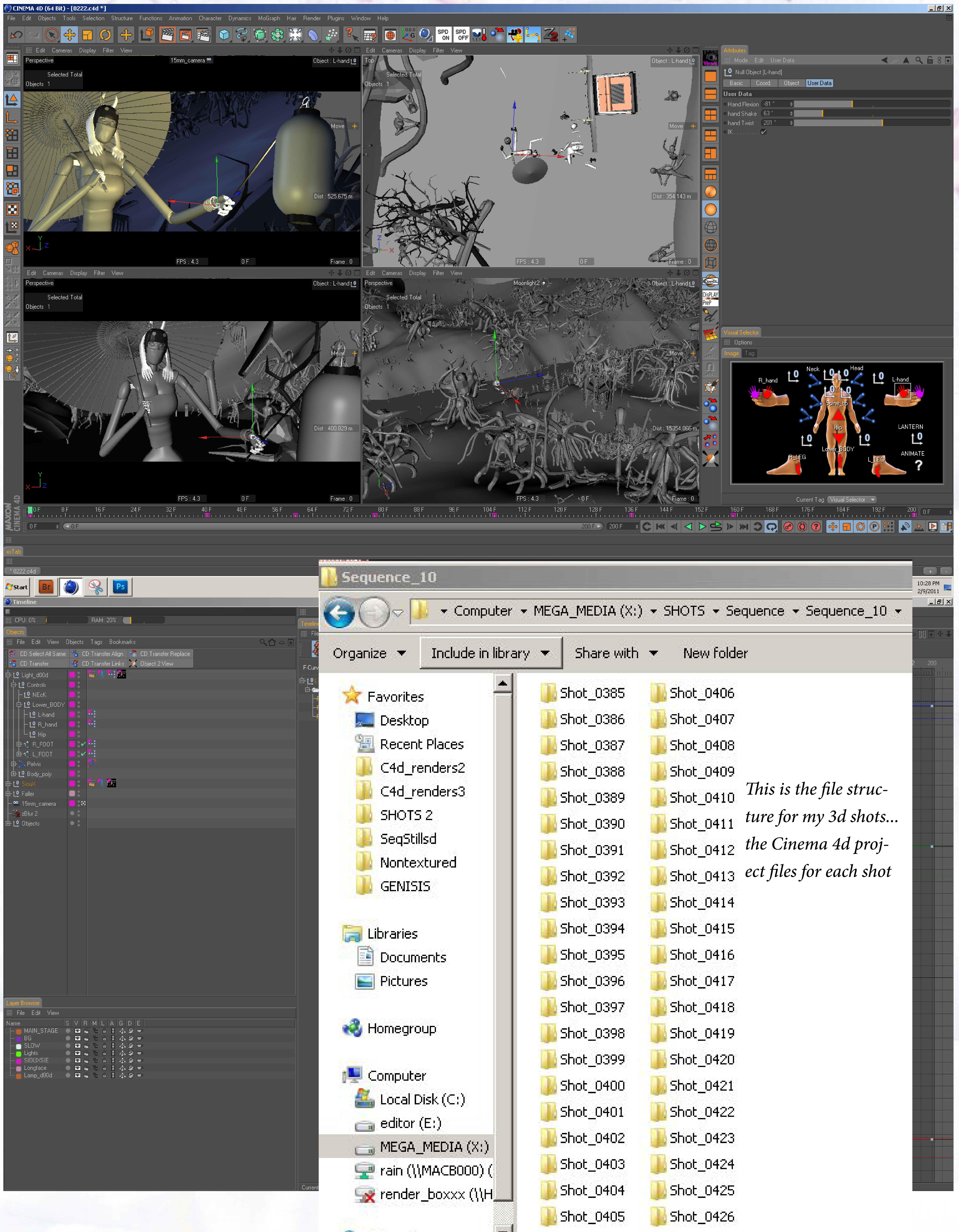
(image, compare raw 3d with comped version)

Something new I did with HSM was the use of matte paintings. When I made WATS I just had 2d sky layers that I dropped behind the shots, but I didn't have any set extensions, mountains, etc. With WATS it worked out as all the ground was totally flat, but with HSM I went for a little more realistic terrain. So in the prep phase for the compositing I went through and made all the matte paintings for all of the sets. I made the matte paintings in Photoshop by using 3d still elements rendered from C4d, such as mountains with trees, etc. Once the rough still matte paintings were done in Photoshop I imported them into After Effects

and since all the layers were intact I added animated elements and video to the matte paintings in After Effects. For example the Photoshop matte paintings would have the basic landscape, then in After Effects I would add in layers of animated fog, video of small fires burning on the hills and video of twinkling stars in the background. I kept these completed matte paintings as After Effects comps to keep my shot comps clean.

Once all the matte paintings were completed I went through and composited the film in order, sequence by sequence. An average shot would have about 12-15 layers. I used the depth passes to not only apply DOF blur in the appropriate shots but I also used them to apply a layer of live action dust in the scenes so it would have a natural falloff. I used the same technique to add practical fog when required as well. To get all the beautiful depth of field blurring and bokeh I used the Frischluft Lenscare plugin. It's simply the best DOF blur plugin for After Effects. I also did motion blur in post with Reelsmart Motion Blur. I didn't use motion vectors as the version of C4d I used had a bug when using motion vector passes with Subpolygon displacement. All of my characters used SPD as they were low poly meshes from Zbrush with SPD applied at render time, to push them back to the 9million+ poly quality created in Zbrush. On top of all of my comps was an adjustment layer with Red Giant Magic Bullet Looks, I created all my own diffusion heavy looks that I used on the film. Magic Bullet Looks is an AWESOME tool to create the final look for your film.

I ended up doing a lot of heavy secondary color correction on most shots with visible light in them because the post process I used sucked all the volume out of the volumetric lights in the 3d renders. To get the light volume back I created heavily feathered solids, colored to match the lights and applied them to the scene using the add transfer mode. Since I was working with EXRs in 32bpc mode the solids looked like realistic volumetric light. If for some reason the color scheme in the 3d scene was horrible I would desaturate the whole shot and then add color back in using these colored solids. It actually worked out quite well and gave it a very soft, painterly look that I really liked. You can see the results in the Cerealis scenes. The look I was really aiming to get in post was a soft, dreamy look. Something akin to a dream about some



weird puppet show. I didn't want it to look hard and perfect like most 3d and I wasn't going for realism either. I wanted a soft fantasy look with a life of its own and I got pretty close to what I was going for. Like with anything else you just have to keep getting reference and keep grinding to get closer to that reference. I used photos of real Marionette shows, Noh theater and stills from some of my favorite looking films like "Escape from New York", "Legend" and "Kwaidan" as reference. Games from the "Silent Hill", "Resident Evil" and "Fatal Frame" series were a major inspiration and reference as well.

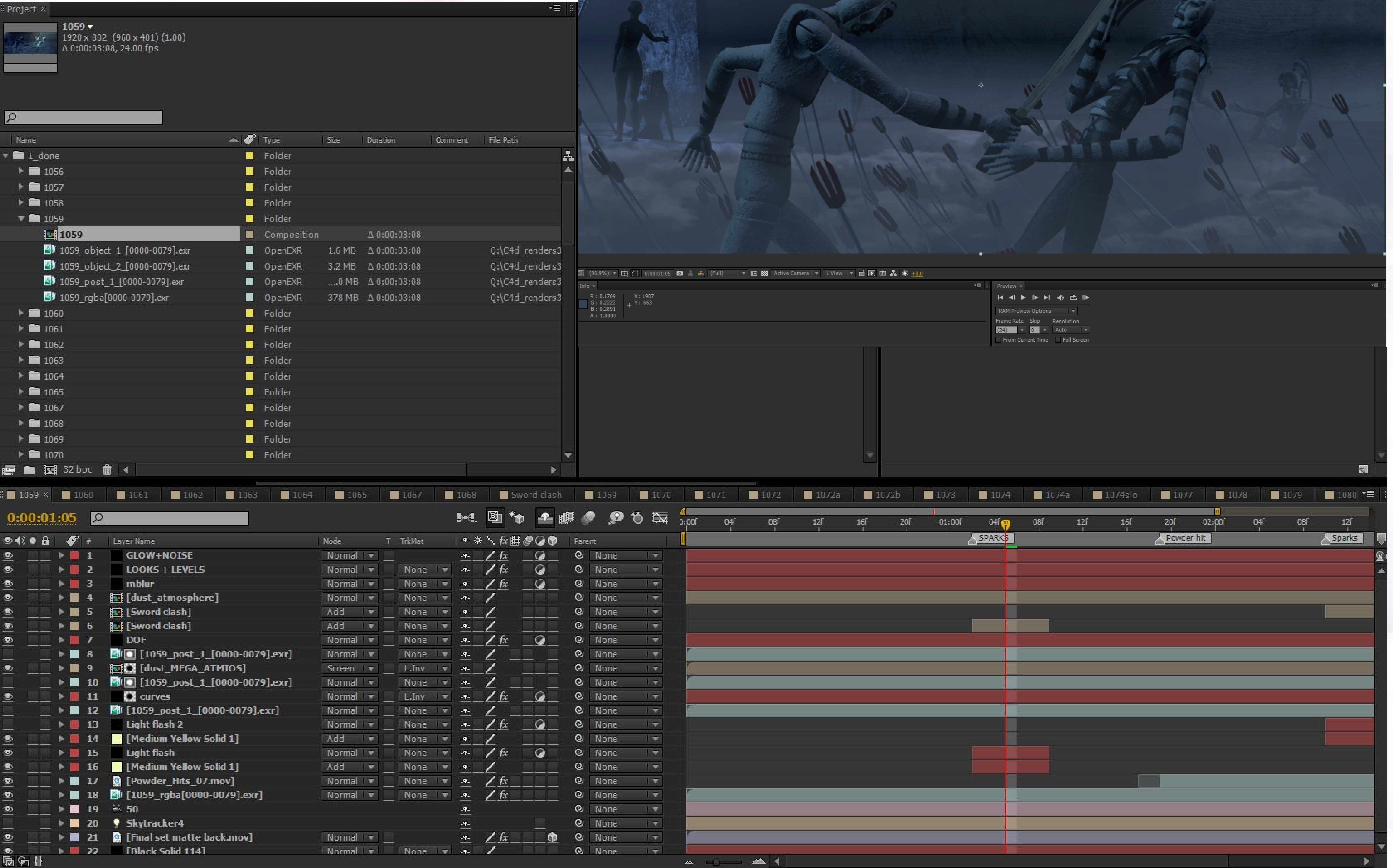
I'm a big fan of copy-paste solutions and since I created the shots in order and had them organized by set all the shots from a specific sequence had the same look, so if I applied the same post look to them all they would all match. So when I was compositing I would work hard to get the look right for the first few shots and then just copy-paste the adjustment layers with the looks applied to all the rest of the shots. Same goes for the level/hue adjustments to each RGBA layer for every shot. This template/copy-paste method helped me speed through compositing. I was able to composite all 1660 shots in less than 2 months. Of course certain shots had their own set of specific problems, so I would have to spend extra time tweaking on those. I didn't render the composited shots as I went along like I did with the 3d renders, instead I waited until I was about halfway through compositing to start rendering shots overnight. I learned a valuable lesson on WATS wherein as I went further with the compositing I would learn new techniques or tricks later on that I wanted to apply to the earlier shots. On WATS I rendered as I went along, so I ended up rendering the same sequences 3-4 times wasting a lot of time and disk space. So on HSM I waited 'til I felt like I had worked out all the tricks and only THEN did I start the renders and that worked out for the most part. Later in the film I found I really liked a heavy diffusion look and the shots earlier in the film were a bit harder, but I didn't feel like it detracted from the film so I didn't go back to change them. I feel that it actually made it feel like you were going deeper and deeper into a dream. That's actually what it feels like for me when I'm working on a film. I start out in reality where things are not so tight, but over time I fall deeper and deeper into the dream and then it's magical. Com-

positing is definitely what brings out the dreaminess.

Editing: I took a different approach from what I've done before when editing HSM. With HSM I was working with a composer whose work I greatly admire and respect, so he and I decided that he would not traditionally score to picture. All throughout pre-production the composer Endika and I would discuss the script to make sure we were on the same page. He created his own sort of emotional script based on my script. We discussed the two to make sure the important emotional moments were all included in his script. Once we agreed he went off and wrote the music based on his emotional script, knowing that I would not ask him to change him. We made an agreement that I would treat the music as law when it came to the editing phase, which I did. I know that music has its own natural flow and by asking a composer to score to picture you are disrupting that flow. You are not allowing it to be in its natural state at all so it's like fake, forced music. I didn't want that and I knew Endika wouldn't want to do that either. I'm always interested in trying new things, in experimenting, so this was a new experiment. As opposed to my sequences, Endika created the music in movements, so I edited the film based on these movements. My sequences were based on location changes and his movements were based on the major emotional breaks in the film as dictated by his music. So editing was pretty simple for me as I didn't have much room to wiggle. The music was my template and law so I followed it.

Endika's interpretation brought some interesting things to the film as I envisioned much of it to be cold, dark, serious and ruthless. Instead of creating music that "fit" the mood that I was pushing, he created very warm, touching music with a slightly comical edge. It's almost as if it wasn't allowing the film to take itself too seriously and with all the comedy I wrote in I think it makes the film better in the end. When Endika gave me the music for each sequence he gave me timecode cues that let me know when a certain important event was taking place, so the first thing I did when editing a movement was to drop the matching shots in on those cue points. It actually made it more fun to edit this way as I had points throughout the edit that I couldn't move, so I had to stretch and compress the stuff around it to work out. I don't think much when I'm editing, I just go with what feels right so editing this way seems very natural.

I edited the film with Adobe Premiere Pro Cs5. It has great integration with After Effects which allowed me to save time because I didn't have to render my edited sequences to get them



Composited image and raw 3d render above

back into After Effects for final output. As far as editing software goes it's all the same to me as long as it can cut. What makes the difference is its ability to integrate with other applications and its import/export capabilities. As far as the process of editing, I didn't do anything different than normal with HSM except I had the revelation that a film is a bunch of cool shots I made strung together. It has nothing to do with me and everything to do with doing ANYTHING to make the film the best it can be as a standalone presentation. When you create everything on your own you get this sense of pride and ownership over your shots that can be detrimental when editing. I had no qualms with killing my babies on HSM.

There were a few scenes I had animated in the film that I had to cut out because they didn't fit when following Endika's score. So instead of asking him to change the music or forcing them in I just cut them out. I'm sure they'll show up on the HSM DVD though. So editing was fast and straight forward for me. No regrets, no redoing, just following the law of the music and going with the flow. Music is the life glue without which you will never know the poet inside of you.

Final thoughts: I know it's sort of difficult to discuss the making of an animated film with words and that it is easier to understand through video tutorials and the like. I will be producing some in depth video tutorials and walkthroughs based on HSM. They will either appear on the HSM DVD or on a separate making-of DVD.

Making of: WHY

These days it seems as if every animated film has its accompanying "art of" book and while most of those discuss the technical merits of the art, most of the questions people ask me in regard to filmmaking has to do with the "why". So in this section I'll do my best to explain why I make certain decisions when making a film.

After I finished WATS I was pretty upset by what happened at Sundance and the reactions from film industry "professionals" who were around me at the time. I wasn't a very happy camper, so I thought I was going to do my "end of the world" film. I was very angry at the time and I wanted to channel that into my darkest and most vengeful film. After all I am a misanthrope. I'm the extreme minority. I have no race and no culture. I'm just

an outcast who seeks to get revenge on the world that I feel has slighted and persecuted people throughout the ages who fought back against the "man". This "end of the world" film does have a title and a premise, but after thinking about it a little more in the months after the WATS release I decided the time was not right for this film. I was also obsessed with Samurai films, that's all I was watching. I watched everything I could by scouring netflix, torrent sites and by buying bootlegs on ebay. I just couldn't get enough! I learned that a lot of my favorite anime films like Ninja Scroll were heavily inspired by 1960s Samurai films, so I said to myself "Since I love these Samurai films so much I should make my own!" I forgot who said it but there's a quote I like that goes something like this "A man is what he thinks about all day." and since I was watching and thinking about Samurai films all day and night it seemed like the time was right.

The Samurai film that really made me go "WHOA!" and totally fall in love with the genre was Kihachi Okamoto's "SWORD OF DOOM". It was so dark and the main character was so silent and moody, I LOVED it. The main character is Sword of Doom is named Ryonosuke Tsuke and he was played by the great Tatsuya Nakadai. So that's where Samhaine got his last name and where Tatsuya got his first name. Ryonosuke's sword style is called the "Silent Form" in English through the translation, so it's no coincidence that the famous play referred to in HSM is also called "The Silent Form". Sword of Doom has this epic, awesome ending wherein the main character is in the middle of this battle in this burning room where he goes insane and slaughters tons of swordsmen, then it ends on a huge cliffhanger! So originally HSM started where Sword of Doom ended. I knew not many people would "get it" but I just thought it would be tite to start a film with some crazed samurai slaughtering all these people for unknown reasons. A sequel to Sword of Doom was never made, but Kenji Misumi directed a trilogy of "Sword of Satan" films that were based on the same story that the Sword of Doom was and they competed the story. I thought the Sword of Satan series was awesome and ended in such a great way that I lost my inspiration to go with the continuation of the Sword of Doom.

I still liked the idea of an "insane" main character. I loved the Ryonosuke character in the Sword of Doom, I thought he was a great hero! But perhaps that just shows how twisted I am! After reading the description of the film, Ryonosuke was supposed to be an "evil" swordsman and all the reviewers talked

about how cold, despicable and cruel he was, but I thought his actions were totally justified! Perhaps his character seemed so because we didn't get to see HOW he got that way in the Sword of Doom. We didn't get to see the circumstances that made him what he was. Perhaps I read into his character and made up my own backstory as to what made him that way, so I had more sympathy for him. So in my story which would have this insane, dark character I would show HOW he became what he was. So my plan was to start by portraying him as insane and dark and then slowly revealing more and more of his backstory, that would explain how he became who he was. Every "bad guy" started as a "good kid" as no one was born evil and since I was trying to keep away from "black and white", "good and evil" characters this seemed like a good idea.

So where did the story come from? Or why did I tell the story that I did? That's a tough question to answer since there's so many storylines and motivations running underneath the narrative, which makes complete sense because originally there were three additional main characters that were cut out simply because the story was too complex. My stories come from a mixture of my real life experiences and made up scenarios. It's like a mixture of past traumas that spin into revenge fantasies and solutions to emotional problems. So in other words it's my therapy!

As I was doing research for the film I read a bit about Jungian theory. I found his archetypes are things I liked to play with. The child, the shadow, the animus. Reading about those things really stimulated my imagination and helped the HSM characters sprout legs, but I should take a few steps back to the path of inspiration that led me to Jung.

In the Hagakure there were several comparisons likening what we call reality with a Marionette show and describing humans as very sophisticated Marionettes. Reading that stuff strengthened my resolve and let me know I was on the right path with this Samurai Marionette film.

In regard to life as a Puppet show and to us as animated characters or Marionettes:

Maybe we just can't see the keyframes? Are we just following a script? Are we keyframed by invisible hands? Maybe we just haven't seen the script? Maybe we are just programmed, but we can't understand the algorithm? Maybe "fate" is just an algorithm that we don't understand?

Once I decided I was going to make a Samurai film I wanted to research the genre, Samurai history and culture. So after watching all the Samurai films I could get my hands on, I then bought all the Samurai film books I could find. The best was "The Samurai Film" by Alain Silver. In that book he made many allusions to the "Hagakure" so, of course, I went out and bought that and read it over 9000 times. I wanted to really get to the root of these films and Samurai culture. The reason I think that Samurai films are so relevant today is that at the core the driving narrative is the "ninjo vs giri" dilemma that stemmed from the influence of Kabuki theater, so the "duty vs. human emotion" dilemma that plagues most everyone at some point in their life. Kabuki was something that was also mentioned as a big root influence in samurai film so I got some books on Kabuki and even went to Japan to see live Kabuki theater amongst other things. I learned a lot about the narrative techniques and conventions that Samurai film borrowed from Kabuki theater. Besides the root "ninjo vs giri" dilemma, there was the "rising dialog", a technique to raise intensity and create tension with dialogue where you go from longer sentences to shorter ones as a dialogue intensifies, until there's nothing left to be said as it's time for action! After learning about the common characterizations in Kabuki I decided I wanted a main character that was both aragoto and wagoto. Nothing groundbreaking, I know, but I'm excited by concepts and techniques and what I learned about kabuki theory was very exciting to me. I've never had a formal education in theater, film, art, acting or anything besides Kinesiology and a bit of Zoology, so reading and studying the art that I have dedicated my life to is definitely exciting. Kabuki's origin was also fascinating and a huge influence on HSM. So at some point Portuguese missionaries came to Japan and were able to convert some people over to Catholicism. This led to a traveling band of Japanese nuns. They were dressed like nuns and travelled the countryside trying to convert people, but eventually they ran out of money and to continue their cause, or simply survive, they became traveling prostitutes?! AND they still dressed like nuns! In order to better advertise their services and entice potential customers, they became performers, dancing and eventually performing plays. The first Kabuki performers were prostitutes dressed as nuns known as the "beggars of the dry riverbed" because their first performances took place on a dry riverbed. I was just fascinated by this! Appar-

ently the Kabuki's performers were so enticing to their potential customers that they would get in fights over who was going to get to buy the performers. Because of fights and riots during the performances, female Kabuki performers were banned and replaced by young boys. However the audience still got into fights over who was going to buy the young boys' time! So then young boys were banned as well and were replaced by men, who still perform Kabuki to this day. In my favorite series of Samurai films, the "Nemuri Kyoshiro" series starring the great Raizo Ichikawa, his character was supposed to be half breed that was born when a fallen Portuguese catholic missionary that became a satanist raped a Japanese woman as part of the "Black Mass", to create the son of Satan! Once I learned about the real life catholic connection between Samurai film and Kabuki I wanted to go deeper into the origins of Japanese theater.

So originally I had envisioned HSM as a sort of bizarre Puppet Kabuki Ghost Story fashioned after traditional Kabuki plays wherein the spirit of a fallen warrior gets revenge from beyond the grave. I read a bit about the different styles of acting in Kabuki and the different types of plays and they all really interested me. I also saw the clear influence over anime and Samurai film. So I was very much into the concepts and principles behind Kabuki and was ready to base the film on them. In early 2008, as I was still working in pre-production, I went to Japan and was able to go to the Kabuki-za theater to see a Kabuki performance, from the cheap seats of course! It became clear to me that Kabuki was more on the entertainment side of things. It was fun to see, but it didn't really speak to me and that has nothing to do with the fact that I don't understand Japanese. I was looking for something more esoteric, something deeply rooted in worlds beyond our normal world and I discovered Noh was the thing I was looking for. There was a brilliant man named Motokiyo Zeami behind it all and lucky for me his secret teaching had just been released!

As a sidenote on my natural development as a filmmaker/artist. Back when I was like 6-8 I had tons of toys, GI Joes, transformers, etc. I pretty much dropped out of school in the 3rd grade and didn't really have any friends to play with on a regular basis but I had all these toys and I would "play

in a very specific way. What I would do was go into my backyard, then take an hour or two to set up all my toys in what I would now call a frozen narrative. So I would set the toys up so things were happening, there were good guys attacking here, bad guys escaping there and when these guys ran through here something would happen. This was all in my head but after I finished setting the scene I would observe it from all the different angles. I'm not just making this up so I make myself seem like some born director or something, but this is really what I did. I'd set up big scenes and then just observe them for hours, viewing them from all possible angles. Then when I thought I had observed all there was to see I put the toys away, but not before setting something on fire of course! So I was preparing for my future job as Koken, I was practicing being a stagehand to Uber-marionettes. I'm sure if my family had a video camera back then I would have made little films, but we didn't.

I didn't know much about Noh other than the fact that I really loved the Masks that were used for performance. So I went and bought some books on Noh. The most interesting stuff I read in those Noh books was the writings and theories by Zeami. I always felt like my process with my art, with film, was a bit different from what everyone else did. But when I read Zeami's treatise on Noh I realized that was exactly what I was trying to do! You would think that since I work with Puppets that Bunraku would be the thing to grab me. I found it to be interesting, but nothing spoke to me like Zeami's writings. Noh was as much a ritual to connect with the spirit world as it was a dramatic Art. I've always held creation in a higher regard than just something to make money or appease an audience. It's MUCH more than that to me and I was excited to read these writings from a master who strived for and achieved a higher Art.

There are several types of Noh play, however one interested me the most. It's called "Asura No" wherein a dead warrior impersonates the ghost of a famous samurai and dances about while describing his final battle. "Kyoran mono", which are "madness pieces", interested me as well. I integrated those two types into HSM.

The following ties in deeply with the story of HSM so once you see it, perhaps you'll be able to dig a little deeper into the subtext. So in Zeami's Noh there was always a certain setup required to perform Noh properly. A backstage or green room area, a stage and a bridge or walkway between the two. The backstage area was the spirit world. In this backstage area the

Masks and torimono were kept, as well as fans, daggers and other inanimate objects that were used in the performance. The performer asked spirits to enter these objects, spirits of fallen warriors, lost lovers or whatever the role required. So the spirit would enter the object, the Mask, the fan or whatever the performer used and then the performer would take the object and walk across the bridge, the bridge between the spirit world and the world of living. The only people who could do these sort of things were priests and ACTORS, so they would take the object from the spirit world across the bridge and onto the stage, which was the world of the living. They would then let the spirit in the object possess them and express its emotions through their performance. So the actors were viewed as mediums, channeling the spirits of the fallen who could not rest and this made the performances all the more spellbinding! Once the performance was completed the actor would walk back across the bridge into the spirit world, bow to and thank the mask or other object, thanking the spirit and then the actor could return to the world of the living. When you see HSM, pay close attention to the first set you see, as there is a stage connected to a bridge and an actor comes across and...

Another thing kinda tripped me out once I read about “Takigi No”, or fire light Noh, a type of Noh that was only performed by firelight. Something else I used to do when I was a kid was on darker nights I would go to this spot in our backyard that had a little clearing surrounded by trees and I would grab a lamp, sans lampshade, from the house and put it in the middle of the clearing. This gave me a little performance space. Then I would ask my mom or sister to come outside and I would act out who knows what?! I remember it being dramatic and somewhat martial arts themed?! I don’t think there were any words, I was just being overdramatic and throwing kicks and dancing if I remember correctly. Maybe I was putting on my own little one man fire light Noh performances by bare lightbulb?

Zeami’s treatise on Noh spoke to me as an artist and

storyteller unlike anything else I have encountered. When reading it I felt like I had come home, like it was what I have been trying to do my whole life, so it gave me guidance and a feeling of reassurance unlike anything else. Unfortunately when I took my HSM research trip to Japan I didn’t get to see a Noh performance, so I’ve just had to read books and watch the Noh videos I find online. Zeami said something else like with his plays he wasn’t interested in anything as trivial as a cause and effect story, but he was trying to recreate real human emotion up on the stage. This really spoke to me as well. There isn’t much of a challenge in telling a story that people can follow and understand, but there is a challenge in truly CREATING human emotion on stage or on screen and connecting deeply with your audience. This is how I’ve always judged films. I don’t really care if I can follow or understand the story at all, I care about whether the film speaks to me or not, whether it really grabs hold of my emotions or not, whether it really affects me and stays with me for days and weeks afterwards or not. I just tend to think of film as a higher Art than most all other “filmmakers”, I believe. When I learned it’s because I was unconsciously following the treatises of an esoteric form of theater from 500 years ago it all makes sense! Zeami was just so HARDCORE! He said things like “Life has an end, but Art has none.” How can that not set your heart on fire?! He said that Masks caused an “internal theatricality” and that “A performer does not use a Mask as a substitute for makeup, he puts it on in order to deny himself the use of facial expression.” Since I chose to use only Masks in HSM and have no faces to express anything through, I denied myself the use of facial expression as a tool to influence the audience.

When researching Noh I read a few things that called the Noh performer the “mime of the orient”, so this led me into researching the art of Pantomime. I couldn’t find much information on the Art of pantomime printed in English, probably because the world’s most famous mime was French and it’s kind of an obscure Art as well. I got some books on the basics of Pantomime and they actually really helped with my visual storytelling and posing skills. Unlike many people I never found clowns, old dolls or mimes scary or creepy. So my inclusion of them in HSM is not my attempt to exploit their images, I just felt that they were the right things to express the characters I wanted to create for the film. In my pantomime research I came across something called the “Uber-marionette”, a term coined and written about by Sir Edward Gordon Craig, a rebel playwright from the 1880s. So of course I bought all the books I could find by him and read them. Mr. Craig thought that the ultimate actor would be like an Uber-

marionette, an extension of the playwright's thought process and emotions. He also talked about what he thought would be the ultimate playwright and as I looked at it the things he talked about back then were right in front of me. Me as an UBERECTOR, with my computers containing my sets and actors that I totally controlled. Me with my 3d characters that I had total control and power over. They were my Uber-marionettes! So the age he was talking about was here!

This is what Gordon Craig had to say about the Uber-marionette in his book "On the Art of the Theatre", it totally reflects my disdain for human actors and the trouble it takes to work with them, "The Uber-marionette is the actor plus fire, minus egoism: the fire of the gods and the demons, without the smoke and steam of morality." So to me it seems as if he wanted a 3d animated character! Actually many of my attitudes on art/performance, etc. seem to be exactly in line with what Gordon Craig was saying way back when. I had never read any of his stuff until recently. I believe there is one true path in Art and since Art is a continuous conversation over the ages, if I am on the same path, I am bound to bump into the words of those who were on the path I am following. But what I'm seeing is that many of the things that prevented those before me to go any further are not there to stop me. I have what Craig called the Uber-marionette at my disposal, I have 30 of them! Craig also said this about the Uber-marionette "The actor must go and in his place comes the inanimate figure-the Uber-marionette we may call him until he has won for himself a better name." then goes on "There is something more than a flash of genius in the Marionette and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. The Marionette appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful Art of a past civilization. But as all Art which has passed into fat and vulgar hands, the puppet has become a reproach. All puppets are now but low comedians." As wacko as I may be that's exactly how I view 3d animated feature films. There is no real life, no real Art in today's Marionettes. They are but, yes, lowly comedians, propped up by social/cultural stereotypes and toilet humor. They can do so much more but theY potential is wasted. So I, wacko uberector M dot Strange, am dedicated to tapping into the power of the Uber-mario-

nette! In HSM I call them M.arionettes, my own perfect actor that I have created to act out my dramas.

From reading books about Mr. Craig I was led into the Theatre of the Absurd. The best book I found about it is "The Theatre of the Absurd" by Martin Esslin. It seems I felt a strong resonance with all types of obscure theatrical movements and styles! Just like when I was reading Zeami's treatise, reading about the tenets of the Theatre of the Absurd also felt like I had come home. It was a response to realism in theater at the time. They were trying to take the Art back from the machinists, sort of like how I feel now about contemporary film. Here are some things Esslin said about the Absurd as opposed to traditional theatre "In certain hours of lucidity, the mechanical aspects of their gestures, their senseless pantomime, makes stupid everything around them. The malaise in front of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable letdown when faced with the image of what we are, this nausea is the absurd." Sure, there are a lot of Artists working behind the scenes on today's mainstream 3d animated films, but there is no actual Art or life IN THE FILM. All the life and Art has been squeezed out of it by committees, focus groups, test screenings, various executives, product placements, etc. So I feel like now true artists need to create and take hold of their Uber-marionettes and use them as vessels for their own emotions. They need to walk across the bridge, into the spirit world and bring this esoteric force into theY films. Be the true creator, the UBERECTOR and present it to the world in its pure form!

There is a lot of talk of death in HSM. As I was reading the Hagakure it made mention of both Buddhism and Shinto, so I read deeper into them. The thing that influenced the film the most from those areas were the books collecting the death poems of both Buddhist monks and poets from feudal Japan. Art has a lot to do with death and life has very much to do with death. Art in its truest form is in sync with nature, with a constant cycle of life and death. In order to be a true artist you need to be in sync with nature and its cycles and rhythms. Samurai culture seemed to be obsessed with death, but until you accept your death you can never really live. After reading so many beautiful death poems I decided to use Samhaine's key dialog as my chance to write my own death poems.

Emotion is law. Emotion makes so “sense”. Emotion obeys no rules. Emotion is vibration, vibration coming down your strings from above.

At the root, what really appealed to me in all of these Japanese arts was yugen. It's sort of an esoteric principle. Zeami wrote about it a bit. It's something you can't easily define. Here is one of Zeami's descriptions of yugen... as all life is pain... and there is beauty in everything... Zeami said the best portrayal of a demon was like a flower blossoming out of jagged rocks... he talked a lot about the flower... an actor... performance...as the flower... he said that drama should be like a flower that opens slowly...slowly revealing its beauty... He also talked about the appeal of madness mixed with elegance, which reminded me of a video I saw of Yukio Mishima talking about the two sides of Japanese culture, what he called the elegance vs. the brutality. Mishima was also a big inspiration for HSM, both in his works and how he lived his life and decided to die.

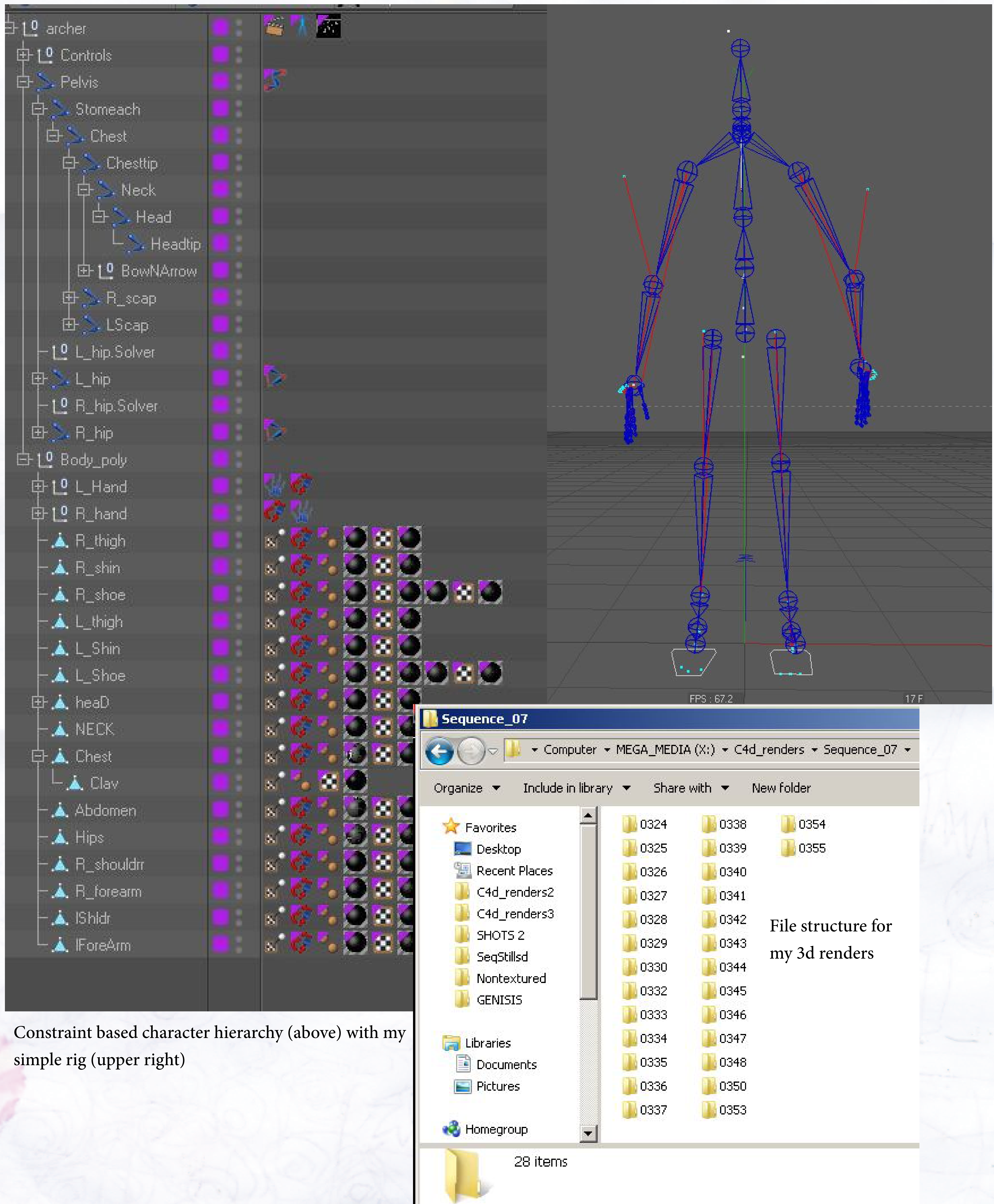
As an artist I've always wanted to find the beauty in everything. I can appreciate the beauty in the darkness, in the sadness, in despair and now I understand the process that is behind it. It's like I was flying blind all this time and just now I've found the map, the blueprints, so I know exactly what I need to do to get where I want to go. So with HSM it's the first time you see me making a film where I actually know what I'm doing. If you view this life as a big Puppet show, a dream and illusion, you can have a better appreciation for all things in this human experience. That doesn't mean I'm going to go out to torture people to death and admire the patterns of blood splatter. In nature there is life and death and when undisturbed, there is a perfect balance in nature and there is a certain beauty in that.

So in the beginning of HSM I was thinking very logically, reading screenwriting and general writing books, which were very far removed from the organic process I was used too, but I studied and learned the tenets of the traditional side of writing fiction. So I wrote a very logical, cause and effect based screenplay. THEN I got deeper into the more esoteric facets of theater and performance and integrated those things, so that by the end I think I ended up somewhere in between and that's where I wanted to be. I don't want to create pure experimental “Art” films, as easy as that might be for me. I'm

not a fan of those. I don't watch them so I don't want to make them. I'm a fan of a good narrative. I like my epic showdowns, psycho action, horrible Monsters and shining Heroes. So I want to create films that sit somewhere in between Art and entertainment without faking it on either side. You can say what you want, but I'm more of an Artist than I am a scheming, schmoozing filmmaker. If you ask me, there is way too much pure mindless, heartless entertainment and not enough real Art out there. It's a real challenge to do both, but it's possible. You just have to work VERY hard and if your only motivation is getting rich or the possibility of getting laid, going to wrap parties or whatever, then you're not going to put the time and energy required to make something truly special in, as it's too easy to lean hard on one side or the other.

How many filmmakers today could write a treatise on their “Art”? When you ask a normal filmmaker today WHY they made a certain film you're going to hear something like “Someone sent me a script and I liked it.” or “Tom Cruise was attached.” For the most part Art has been DEAD for a long time in animated feature films, both “indie” and mainstream. So I'm here to do my part and put my life into my creations and I hope there are some people out there who are hungry for such a thing.

So why did I make HEART STRING MARIONETTE? Simple, because I had to. There was nothing else I could do with my life at the time. I am a HEART STRING MARIONETTE and I've always been one even though I didn't know I was. Now that I can explain it a little and actually base a narrative around it, that explains to me why/how I became who I am and why I do what I do. With a chance that this MIGHT help do the same for some people out there, it was my RESPONSIBILITY to all Artists to make this. I have no “life” outside of Art as IT IS MY LIFE. To live I have to create. To continue to receive the energy coming through my strings I have to be real, I have to be authentic. I have to be as I am at that current time, so HSM is as am I am right now. A slice of my experience played out with strange Puppets in dramatic situations, with Monsters... and gainaxing.



Constraint based character hierarchy (above) with my simple rig (upper right)



CHAPTER 7

Workflow



Workflow is something I think a lot about and plan, without really realizing it, since there is no disconnect from my regular life and my film production life, as I tend to approach it all the same way. Success, time and time again, has to do with planning. If you don't properly plan, your chance of succeeding drops significantly. On a short project you can get away with not planning, but on a long form heavy project, like an animated feature film, a lack of proper planning = failure. Stanley Kubrick said something to the effect that filmmaking was just a succession of problem solving or something like that and if you can't work out a good way to solve problems, then you can't make a film. I mean from the start it's all about problem solving.

Problem #1= I want to make a film but I don't have an idea.

Solution= Come up with an idea. If that's too big of a task break it down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

That's what it's all about to me and it just makes sense. Making a short film is like eating a small cheeseburger. Yeh maybe you could eat it in two bites or less and get away with it, you could also do it in large bites, but if you are making an animated feature film and not planning properly, that's like trying to eat a moose in one bite. YOU'RE GOING TO DIE! You're going to choke to death or not even try to eat it, since it's so overwhelming a task when faced with it as a whole. Through your workflow you break your film down into manageable pieces that you can complete without choking to death or dying. Those small pieces aren't that intimidating either. When I was a kid I saw a segment on the TV show "That's incredible", where a guy ate an entire bicycle. He did so by cutting the bicycle into tiny pieces the size of a dime. There were hundreds of pieces, but he just ate one or two a day for a year and then he was done. THAT is how you should approach developing the workflow for your project.

Just like with eating, if you eat too much and gorge yourself, odds are you'll get sick and won't be able to do much for awhile. Equate that to burnout. Very often people will try to complete a huge project in one go, they gorge themselves and get sick, they burnout and fail. You want to make it so you can keep eating manageable amounts every day for prolonged periods of time.

So production planning is a very logical and simple thing to me and I use the same approach in all aspects of my life. It's all about longevity, focus and consistency.

My order of operations or workflow is explained in detail in the "making of" chapter of this book, but I'll outline it again here. It's

based on this "bite sized" approach.

Brainstorm--> Outline--> Script--> Storyboard--> Animatic--> Inventory--> Concept art--> Modeling--> Layout--> Lighting--> Rigging/Char set-up--> Animation--> Rendering--> Compositing/Color Correction--> Editing

Something I didn't talk about in the "making of" section is the prep and error correction part of some of the phases. So, for example, in the animation phase, once I finished animating a sequence and that sequence finished rendering, I would render out temp movies to watch for all the shots in that sequence. I would make notes of any errors, then correct and re-render those before moving on to the next sequence. I should probably write a bit more about the sequence approach as well.

Sequence approach: So the film as a whole is a huge undertaking. Tons of shots and tons of sets, so I first break the film down based on the sets/locations. I know from experience that once a set is lit and ready to go, it's easy to keep working in that set rather than to leave it and move to another, just to have to come back later. So HSM starts in the "Nether World" set and that is Sequence 1, then it moves to "Wor Manor" and that is Sequence 2, and so on and so forth. I come back to those sets later in the film, but those are different Sequences. I guess it would be convenient to group all the shots in a set to the same sequence, but I have a different approach. I make my films in linear order because I know I will get better as I go along and I want the film to get better as you watch it. So I will always make them in order.

So HSM was broken into 45 sequences, based on location changes. I would look at each month and figure out which sequences I would complete each month. How do you figure that out? Through testing for one thing. Animate and complete some test shots at the level of quality you want to achieve, work at the level of intensity you want to do for the film and also spend the amount of time on it that you know you'll have to give to the project on a daily basis. Once you've done this, it will give you a good idea of how many shots you can complete in a day.

Then use this estimation to figure out your desired daily quota. Let's say you know you can go 5 shots a day and Sequence 1 is 45 shots. You can make a pretty accurate guess now, that Sequence 1 will take 9 days, but based on experience you know that delays happen, so add another day or two. So give yourself 11 days to complete said Sequence. When looking at the big picture you have to figure out how much time you want to spend working on the film. So at the level of quality you're happy with, you determine it's going to take you 5 years just to animate the film and that's too much for you. You either have to decrease the quality of animation to decrease the time spent or shorten the film. My goal for HSM was to animate all 1600 shots in 12 months, which I ended up doing in 11 months. If you're giving yourself an unlimited amount of time to complete your film, you don't have to worry about quotas, BUT ALL MY WORK IS BASED AROUND DAILY QUOTAS.

You can use quotas for everything. Number of script pages you must write per day, how many storyboard frames to draw per day, how many models to model per day, how many shots to animate per day, how many shots to composite per day, etc. It's these daily bite sized pieces that will allow you to complete HUGE projects on your own without dying. The key is to break the entire process down. Once you do, it sort of sucks the magic out, which many creative people seem to need to feel to get work done. When you get down to it, though, there's not much magic to the process of actually making the film. It's a daily grind and you're a little factory, an assembly line. That's the way it is. The thing that keeps you inspired is knowing that if you keep this up over time, you will have that magickal thing you envisioned at the very beginning.

I've found a lot of creative or artsy people have a problem with this process. They are used to getting a spark of inspiration, then going off and completing the work with that inspiration. As soon as that initial spark of inspiration dies, so does their work ethic. I'm here to say that this way of working is very amateurish. You want to be a professional! A BIG help for my turning professional and getting the job done was the book "THE WAR OF ART" by Steven Pressfield. Go read it now! Most Artists/Creatives have a very amateurish approach. They don't look at it like what it really is,

which is WORK. The work is fun sometimes, but it's also very agonizing and boring at times. So will you quit like a weak willed amateur in those times or will you persevere and power through it like a professional?

I break each month down, so that I know which sequences I'm completing and I also have to work in a few extra days for prep work and for error correction. So the first 1-3 days of the month are attributed to prep work for the sequence to animate. This includes recording the temp voices required for lip sync, re-storyboarding the sequences if necessary, creating any additional models required for the shots added in the new storyboards, if any, as well as creating the necessary file/folder structure for that month's work. You want to make your file structure in a logical way so that finding files is effortless, so you want to use the same file/folder structure every month. Take some time before you start and figure out the best way, then stick to it. I draw workflow diagrams on paper to work it out and then I do some test work to see if I missed anything. Try to consider what you'll have to do in post as well when working out the file/folder structure. I made an error in HSM when I made my sequence folders for animating. For a given shot in Sequence 1 this is that the file structure looked like :

My media drive:/Sequences/Sequence01/Shot0001/Audio/0001.aif

That worked fine when animating, because to load the audio I just had to navigate to the folder where the 3d project file was saved and go into the audio folder. However when I got to edit phase, to get the audio files out I had to go through each shot folder one by one to extract said audio files to use in the temp edit. So the hierarchy should have been like this:

My media drive:/Sequences/Sequence01/Audio/

So at the root of my SequenceXX folders, I should have had a folder called "Audio" to go along with all the Shot folders, so that when I got to the edit I could have just imported the contents of that audio folder into my editing program. The reason I had shot folders, instead of just saving the 3d files in that directory, was that I would often save variations of a shot like "Shot0001a_redo" and the like, so it would have made a mess of that directory.

This is why you do run-throughs and tests to work as many of these kinks as possible out, BEFORE you go into produc-

tion and have the pressure of your quota hanging over you. Granted you can't work ALL the potential problems out and you could also just stay in this testing phase forever. It's easy to get into the fear and testing cycle that never ends. Once you've done a fair amount of testing you just have to GO FOR IT. If you've ever seen a race in track and watched the sprinters take their marks, set their feet, then stand up and do it again a few times, constantly getting set, those runners have a gun going BANG to let them know its time to GO, but we have no such gun and many people get STUCK readjusting their feet forever. I've known people who wanted to make a film or whatever, yet they never got out of the testing or research phase so they don't want to ever do it. You'll NEVER feel 100% ready, there is always going to be some doubts, but you have to go anyway because IT IS A RACE. If you're an filmmaker you're competing with every other filmmaker in the entire world! Whilst you're standing still, constantly readjusting your feet, some other filmmaker's already lapped you a few times and by the time you decide to go the race is over. It's like WATS was FAR from perfect, but what would have happened if I had hesitated or had taken forever and released it in 2011 instead of 2007? The mainstream has already done 8bit/anime styled stuff, so it would have just been "meh". It would have lost its impact! That's the RISK you run if you take forever, especially if your ideas are NOT new and groundbreaking. If you're doing something that capitalizes on CURRENT trends then you better get that thing out FAST! Because its time will pass very soon. If you're behind the times then no rush, because its time has already passed. If you're ahead of the game, you have a little more time, but don't lag too much or else the mainstream, the mediocre middle, will catch up to you and steal your thunder. So think about all that when coming up with your quotas. How many years do you think your film will have its maximum impact for? Are there other films coming out in the future that are like yours or could steal its fire? Then you better BUST and GRIND to get it done before them or come up with a new idea that gives you more time. When working on HSM, I've already seen a few projects that show me that a part of the vibe/style I'm pushing in HSM and it will creep closer to the mainstream in the coming years, so for me to thrive and survive I need to beat them to the punch! So production is very systematic for me. It feels like I am a machine completing these tasks everyday, it feels like work.

Some days I'm not inspired at all or feel crappy, but I know all I have to do is complete that daily quota and I'm good and still on track. Without a quota there's a lot of fear. "WILL I FINISH ON TIME?! OMG AM I FALLING BEHIND?!" These thoughts don't exist if you've broken your work down properly and have a daily quota. So with HSM I figured out amongst those 45 sequences that there were 1600 shots and I knew I wanted to do it in a year. So 1600 divided by 365 is 4.5, so I knew that if I animated 4.5 shots a day I could complete it all in a year. Granted there are those few days each month for prep and error correction, so I pushed the quota up to 5 shots a day for a year. I had already done some testing, plus I had my experience working on WATS and 5 shots a day didn't sound scary or intimidating at all. "I COULD DO THIS!" I said to myself. It was no longer a moose, it was a bunch of little sandwiches. I'm a VERY competitive person and I've turned this competitive nature against myself to get more work done. I would compete against myself to see how many shots I could do every day, every week, every month and I knew any shots I did over my quota would mean that I could afford to take days off, or even short vacations, because I would still hit my deadline. This takes much of the stress away from production. It allows you to focus solely on the shots you have to do that day and ignore the rest. Five shots of stress a day isn't too bad, then when those shots are done THE STRESS IS GONE, since you know you're on track to hitting your goal and finishing on time. So one of the keys to my productivity is creating daily quotas. The other part is the constant evaluations, the constant auditing. Every few weeks I will count the number of shots I've completed and how many need to be done to figure out where I am in the production. By setting the quotas, you know where you want to go and by constantly evaluating your progress, you know where you are at that point in time. These two things are KEY to actually getting there. It's too easy to lose track of where you are in production, so I'm always looking at the calendar and figuring out when I'm going to complete certain sequences. For example if I took longer than I had planned on Sequence 2, then I have to shift the dates for the other coming Sequences and perhaps even up some of their quotas to make up for lost time. I might even have to cut some scenes out entirely. Finishing the film is a WAR and you're going to have some losses, but the only thing you care about is keeping the majority of your troops alive

and winning the war. Because it's all about winning the war and completing the film. In the end no one will care how hard you tried or how hard you worked, how much you cried and complained. If you don't finish, no one will care at all. Even if you do finish it, people don't care about the details, they care about the film and what's IN IT. What happens outside of the film is none of the audience's business and they don't care. All that matters is what is up ON THE SCREEN. When you take this perspective it's easier to make the sacrifices required to complete the film.

Now I know that not everyone can dedicate all their time to making their film like I do. Let's say you worked full-time and only had 4 hours you could work per day, instead of the 8 hours I do. Then it would take you twice as long, so two years to complete animation production on a feature film. That isn't not so bad, eh? Some people may be saying "If I work full time and work on my film 4 hours a day, every day, I won't have time to have a life!" I would argue that passion knows no bounds and if you stay connected to those strings, you will have the energy and willpower you need to make it happen. But it's clearly NOT FOR EVERYONE. You have to be HARDCORE and the truth is most people are WEAK-WILLED, they're WIMPS. So if you're a weak-willed wimp don't even try it, because you will fail. Stick to playing on Facebook or something, cause Uberecting is not for you, it's the ultimate creative challenge. If that gets your blood pumping, maybe it's for you?

Workflow and asset management are not "sexy" topics, but they are essential if you want to complete big projects. As far as backups go, I follow this guideline: backup as often as you can afford to lose data. So if you'll be okay with losing a weeks worth of work, then backup once a week. If you don't even want to lose a day's worth of work, then backup every day. When animating, I back up everyday. I use a program called "Allway Sync". After each day of work I plugged in an external drive, then ran the "Allway Sync" jobs I had setup to backup my 3d project files, BOTH for the assets and the shots themselves. I didn't lose any data through the whole production and my backups saved me three times, after I accidentally deleted elements and saved some project files that I needed later. Backup is something people don't think about until something goes wrong and they go "OOPS, I should have backed up!" That's very amateurish. If you're working towards a deadline, you need a backup solution. Hard drives have never been cheaper, so just get into the

habit of doing it every day.

In the making-of chapter I talked a bit about how I manage my 3d assets, wherein I break them into categories and use Cinema 4d's content browser to access it all. These are the categories I used for my 3d assets:

For the actual C4d project files:

My media drive: 3d_shots/Sequences/Sequence01

For my 3d assets I used the following categories inside of an HSM folder:

Characters, Masks, Props, Sets, Interior Objects, Exterior Objects, Materials, Other, Tests

Characters: The rigged character models that were used in the film were in here, so I could just drop them into a scene and go to work.

Masks: These were all the finished Masks for the film. I sometimes swapped them out on the finished characters, so I needed access to them.

Props: Things like swords, guns, candles, fans, umbrellas, working doors, etc. Usually things that would be handled by the characters, or were used interactively by the characters.

Sets: These were the completed, lit sets ready for production, so when I would start a new sequence, I would open the set file, drop the characters and props in and get to work.

Interior Objects: These were the objects I used when laying out an interior scene. Tables, lanterns, lamps, walls, etc.

Exterior Objects: These were the objects I used when laying out an exterior scene. Trees, statues, stones, hills, etc.

Materials: This is where I kept all my custom materials. The content browser displayed rendered thumbnails, so it was easy and fast to search through the materials.

Other: These were special FX files and other weird things like sword sparks, blood FX, shatter FX stuff. I also saved my custom camera and lighting setups in here.

Tests: If I had to use a new technique, I would create a new project file and create the test there, so these were the project files for those. This folder was used a lot. Say, for example, I needed to shatter a mannequin and run a dynamics sim. That file would be saved here. I also saved special

Xpresso setups I made in here.

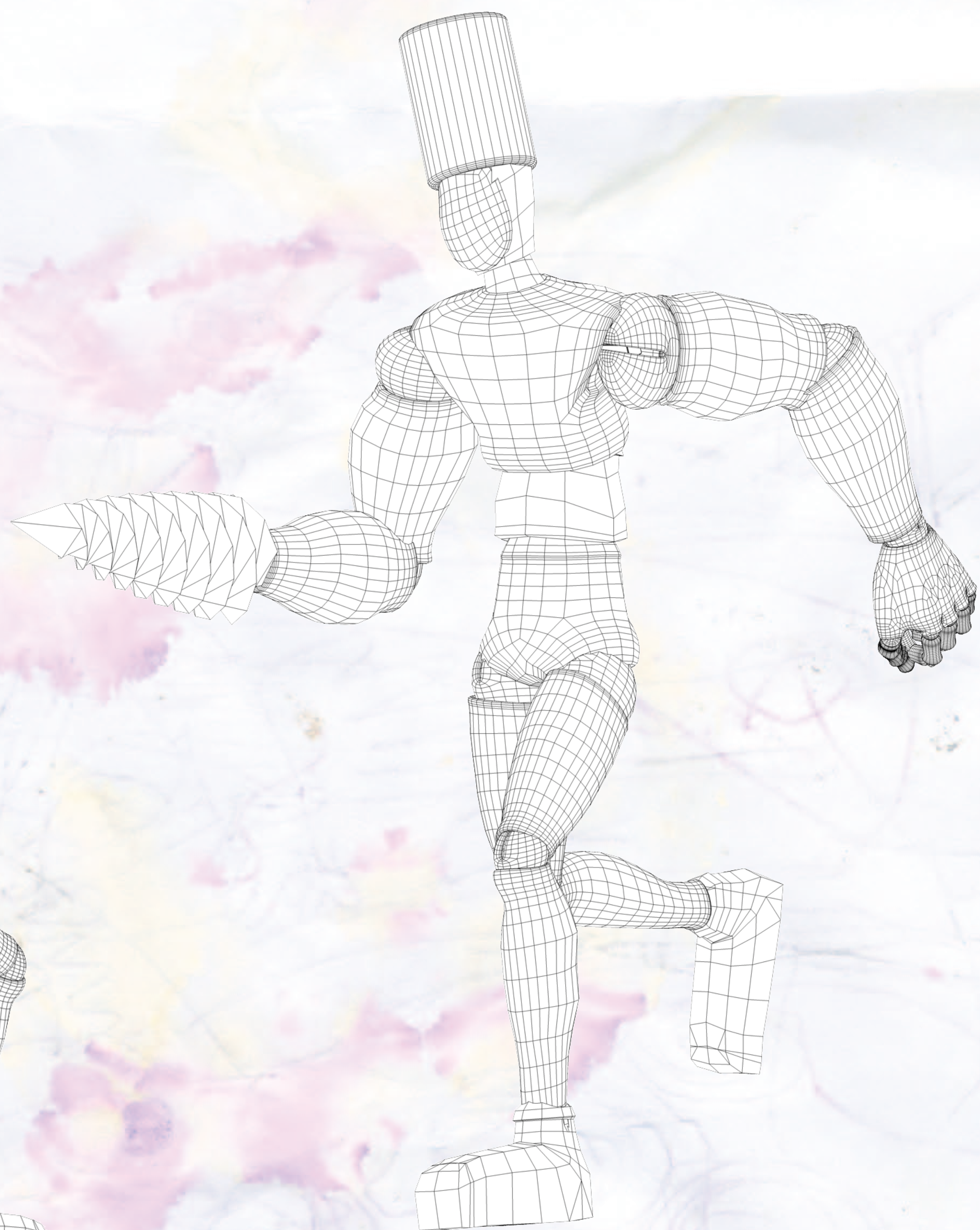
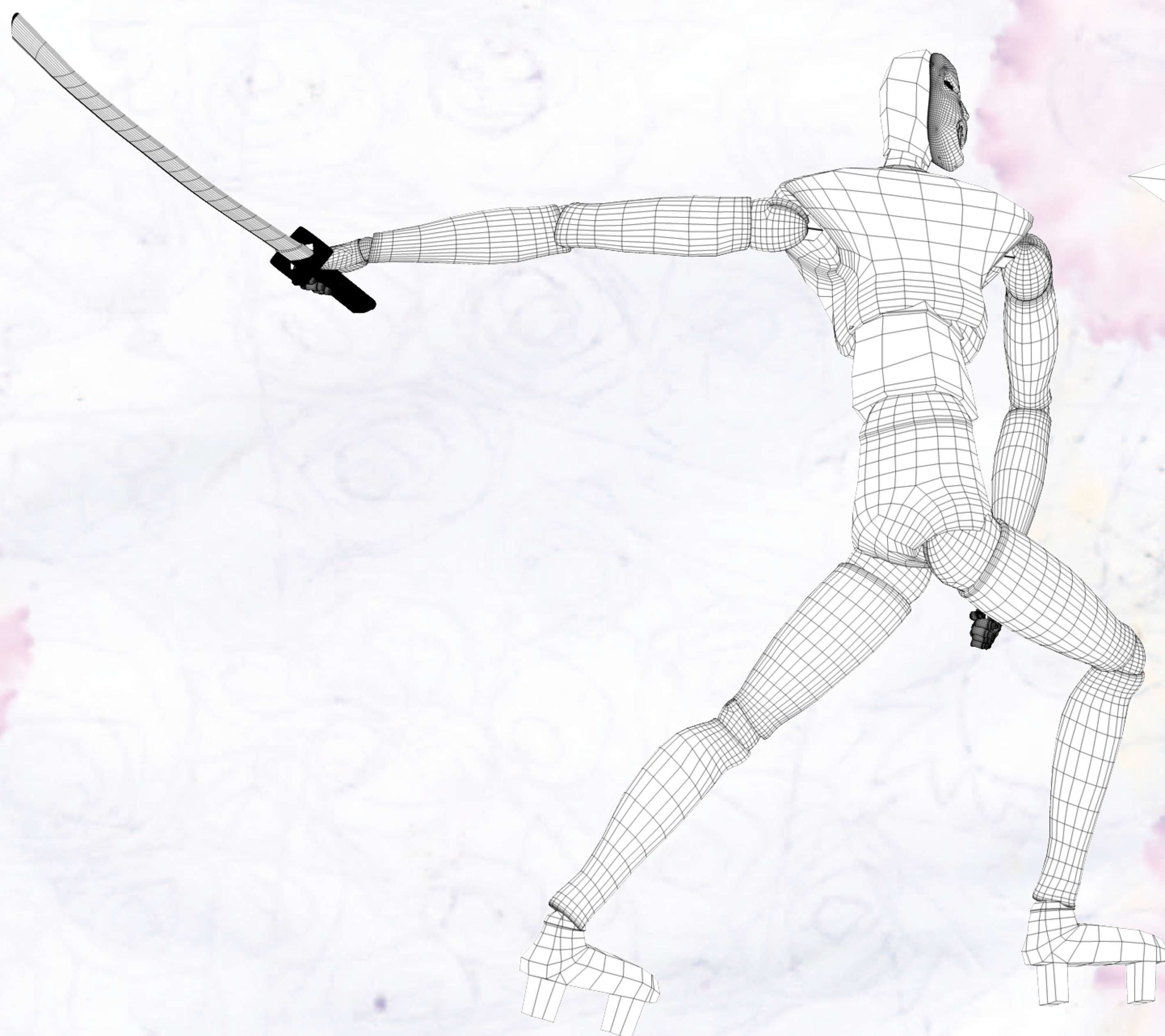
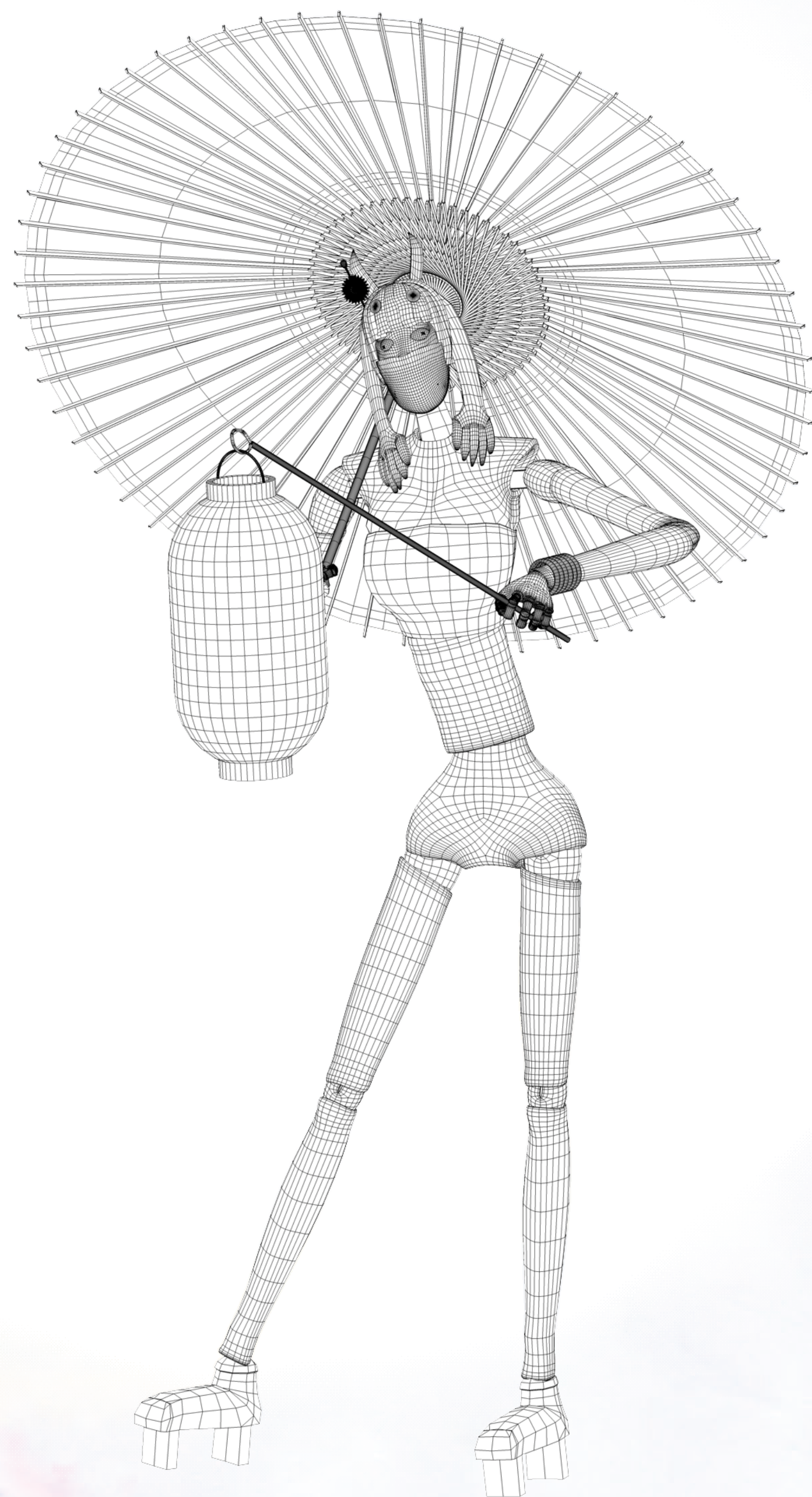
It's all about having a modular approach. You're creating all these separate 3d elements that you can simply plug into your scenes, so you create your own camera/lighting rigs. I also saved my own render setting for "preview" renders and "Final renders", so that I could easily switch between the two when working. Another important part of my workflow, that I mentioned in the Making-of section, was that I always had Adobe Bridge open whilst animating and whenever I finished a shot, I would render out a still or two from it and place that into a sequence folder that was opened in Bridge. That way, when I finished animating the film, I could look through the entire film in still form. It's sort of like a rendered storyboard. This was ESSENTIAL because when I was setting up a new shot, I would look at the previous shots so that I could maintain a good visual flow. I had the physical storyboards on hand as well, but the final renders usually deviate from the storyboards and it's great to see the final look. Also, let's say you were working on a shot and you decided you wanted the lighting setup, or even the same character animation from an earlier shot, you would just look through the sequence stills in Bridge and find the appropriate shot and load it up. Grab what you need out of it and go. I didn't do this on WATS, but it was a huge help with HSM and I will do this from now on.

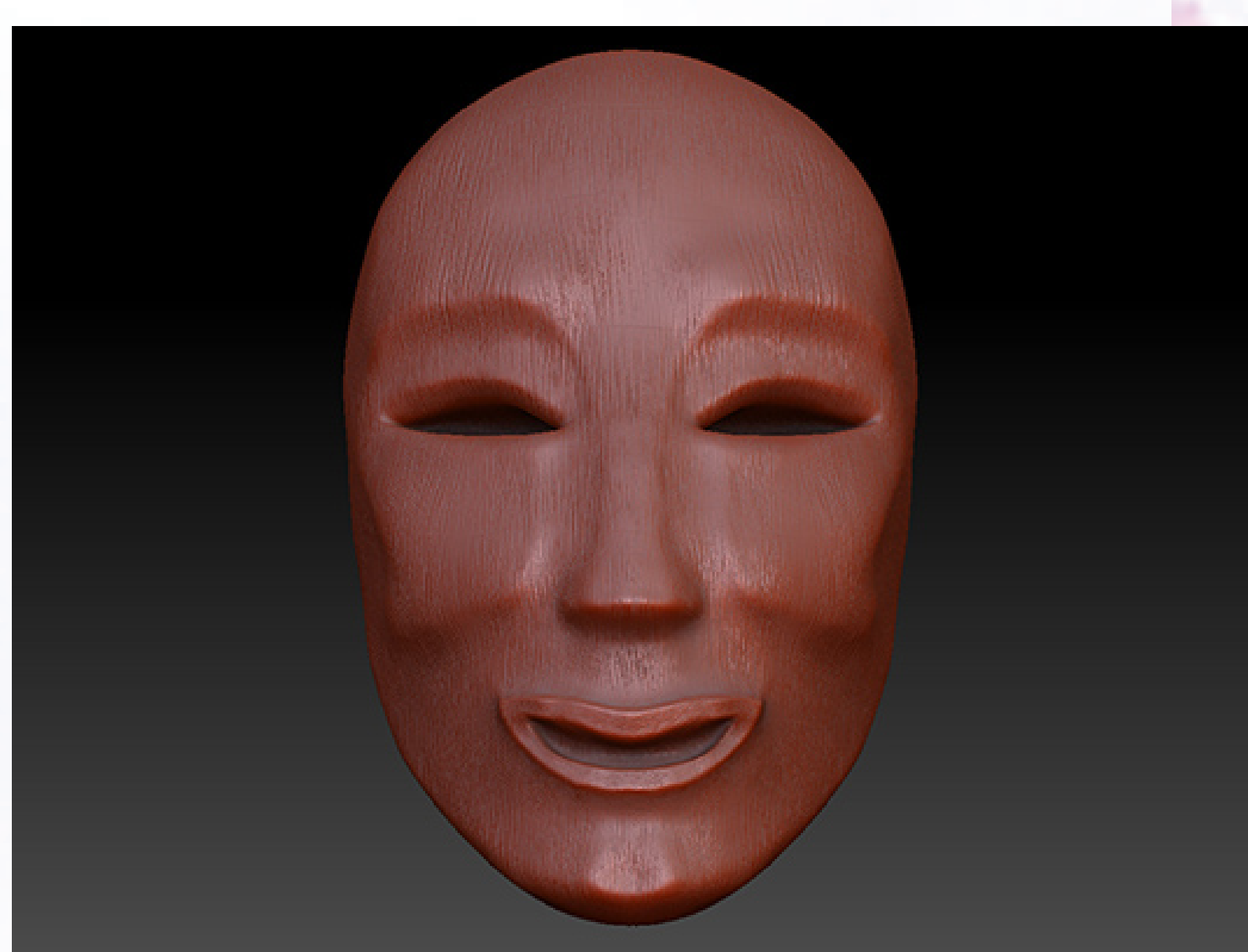
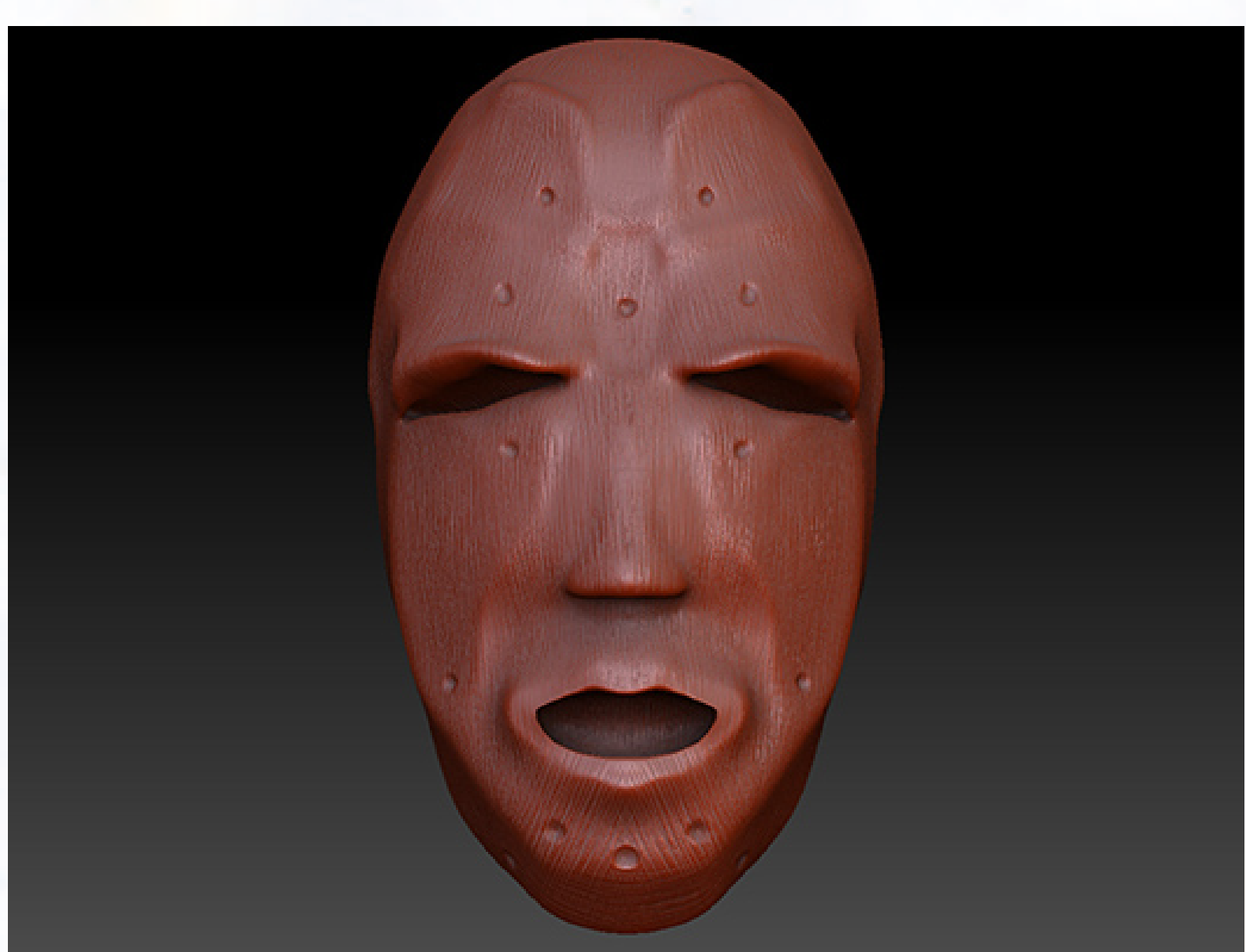
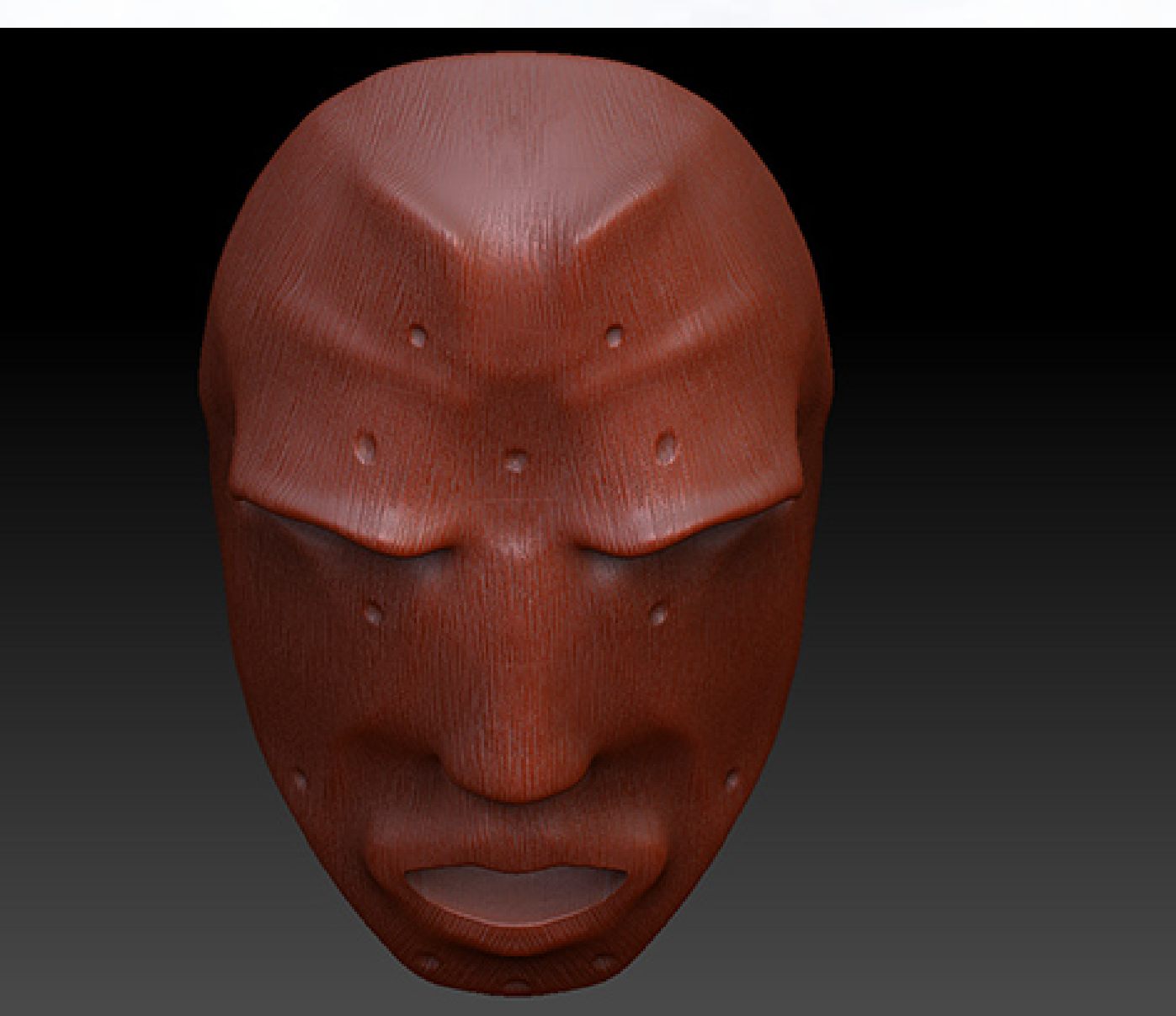
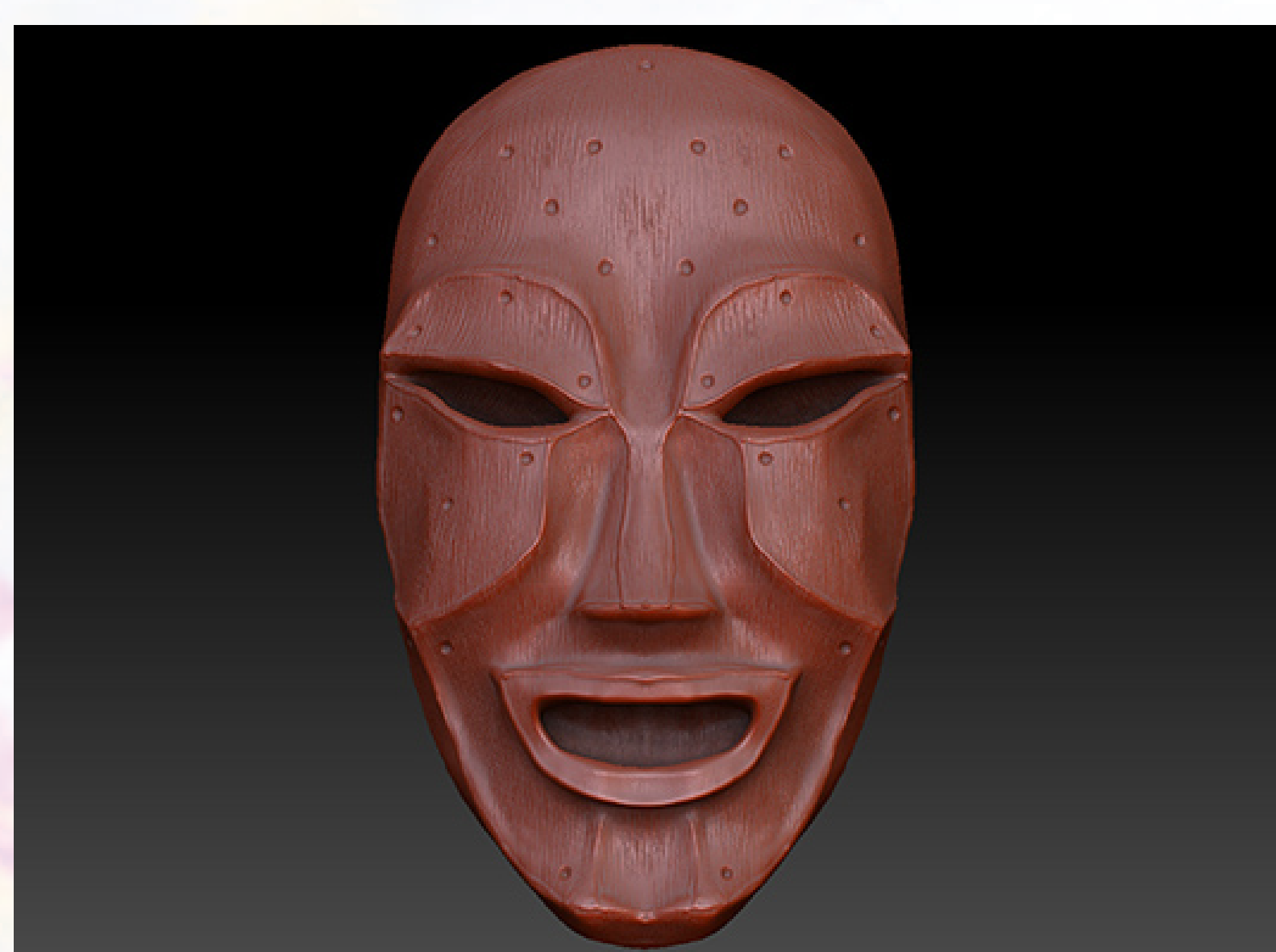
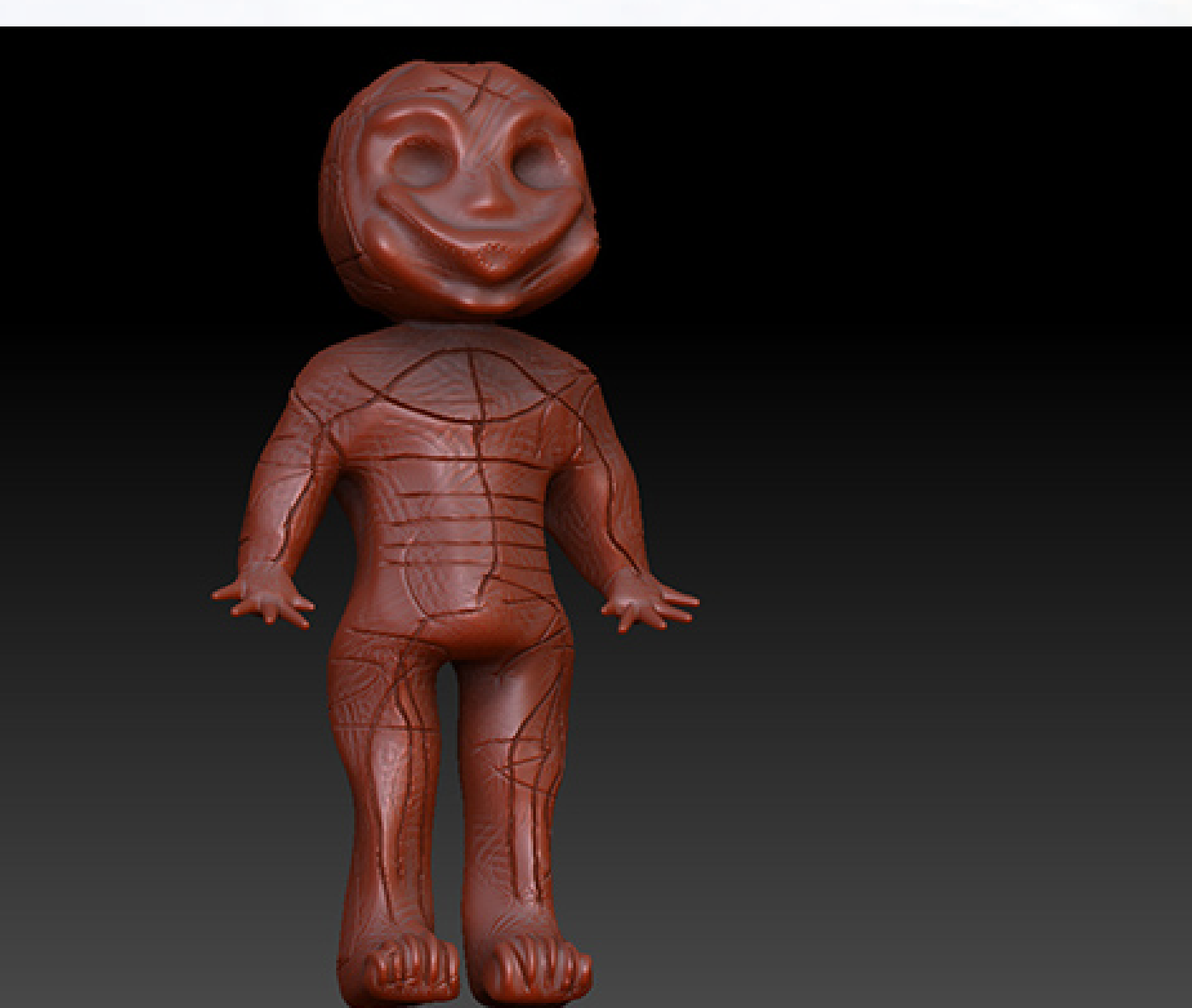
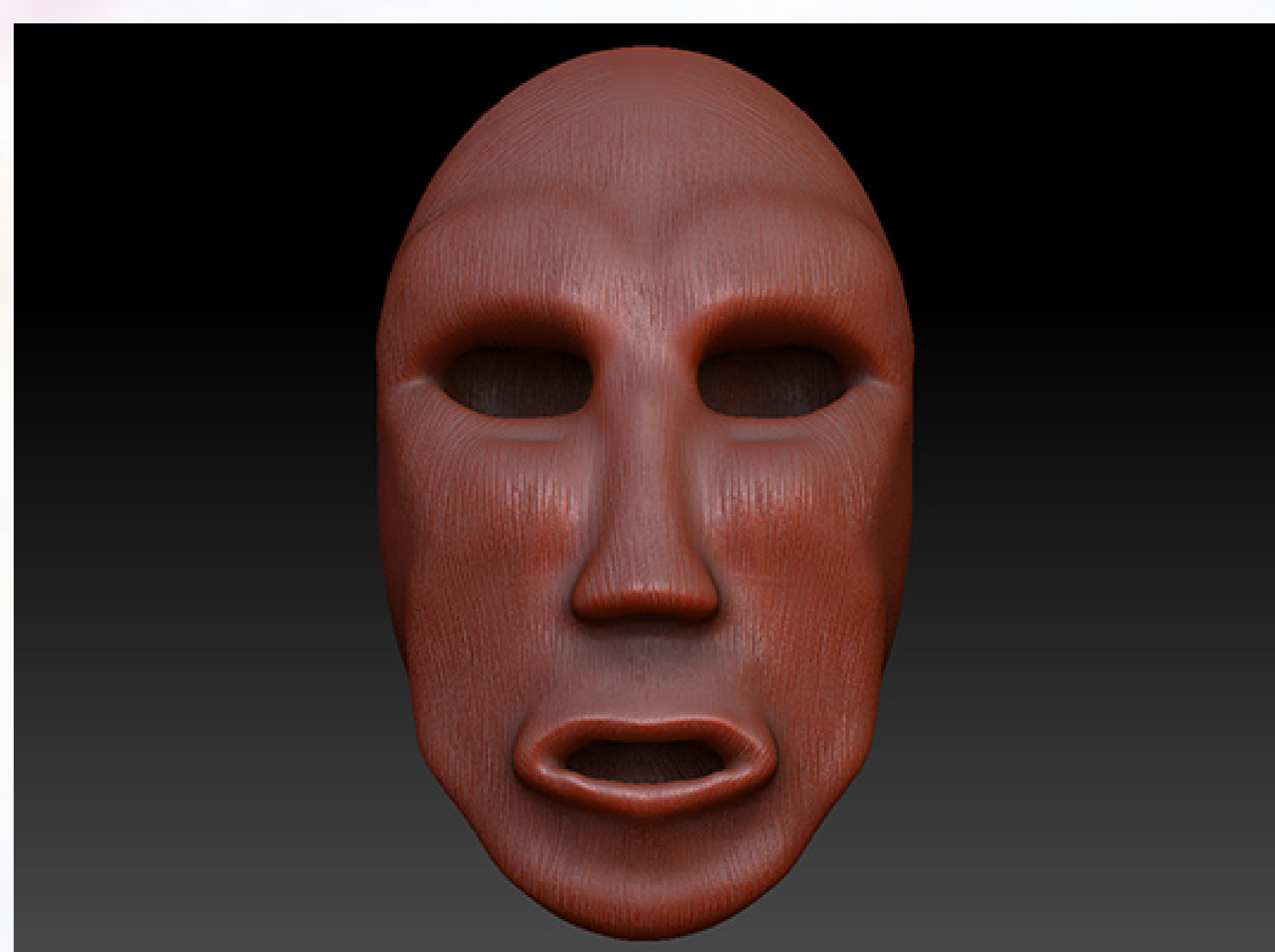
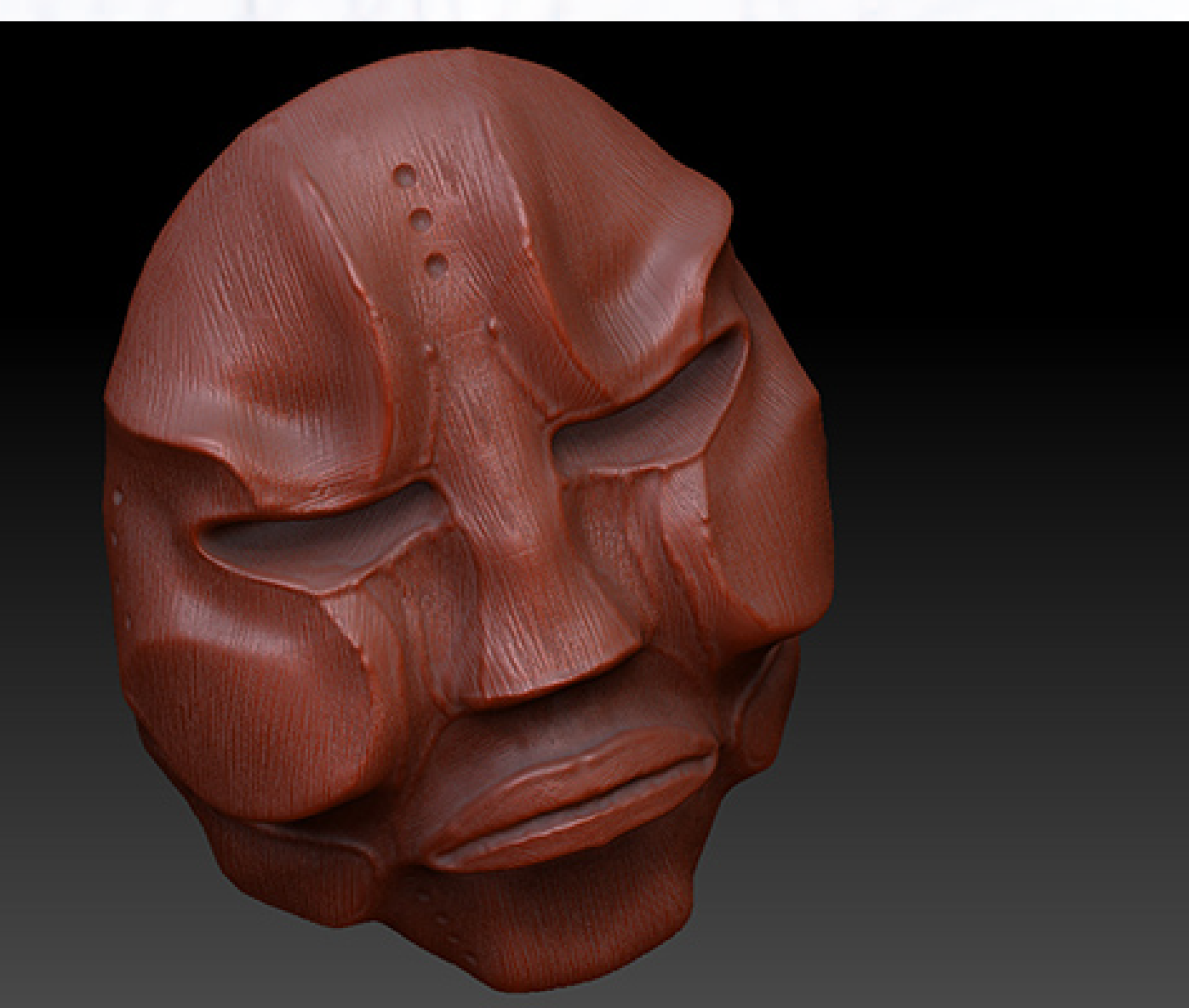
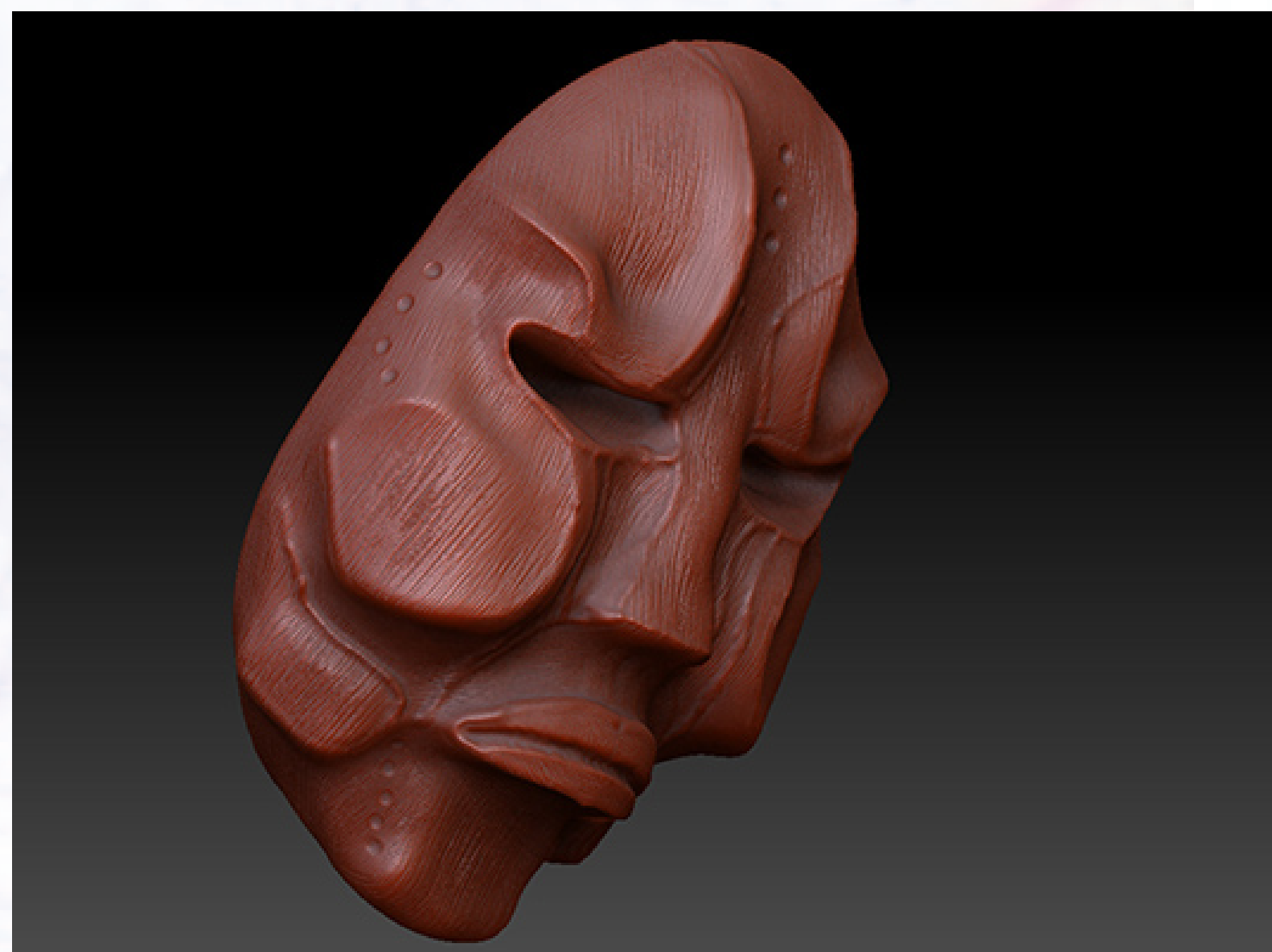
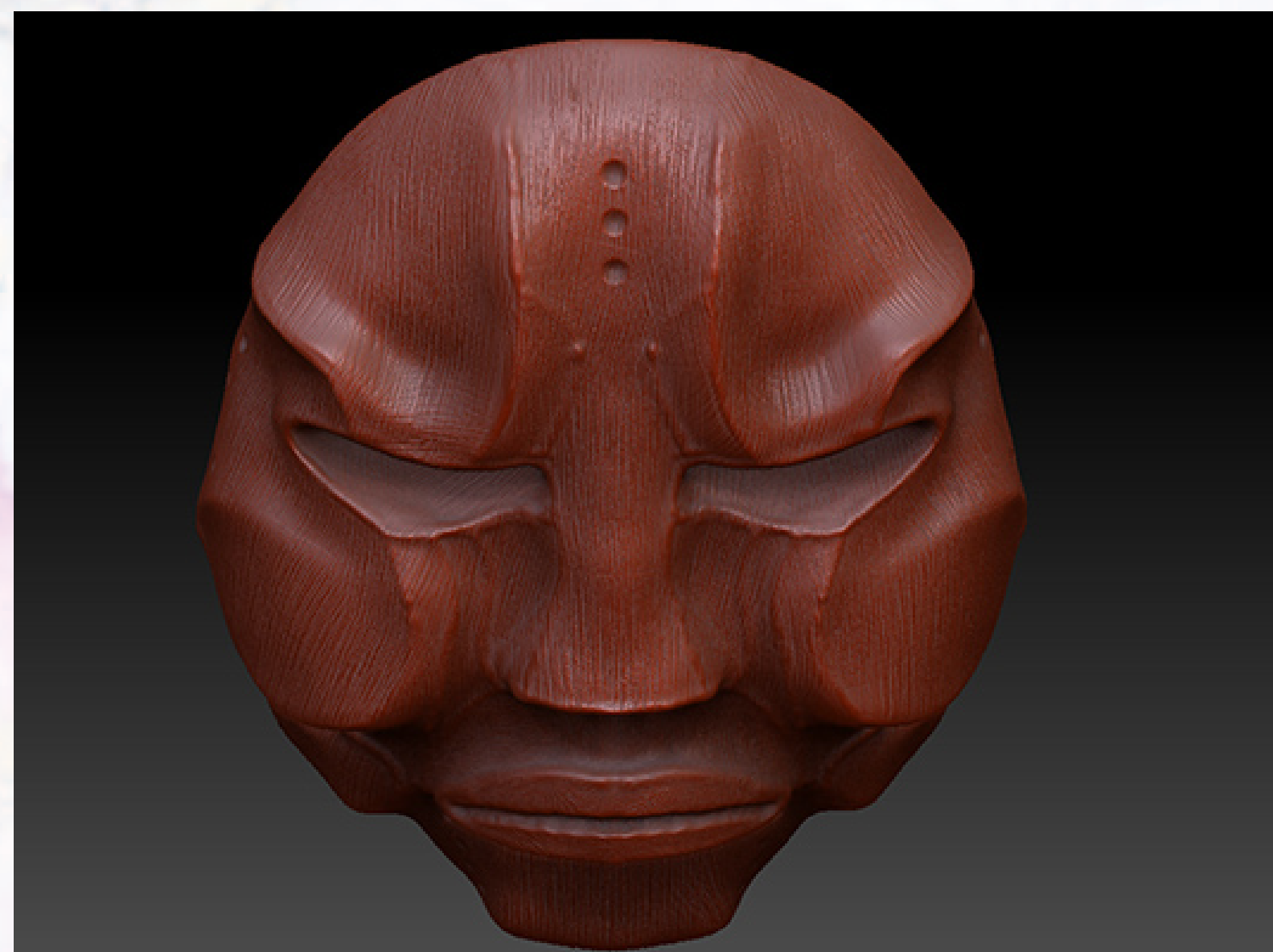
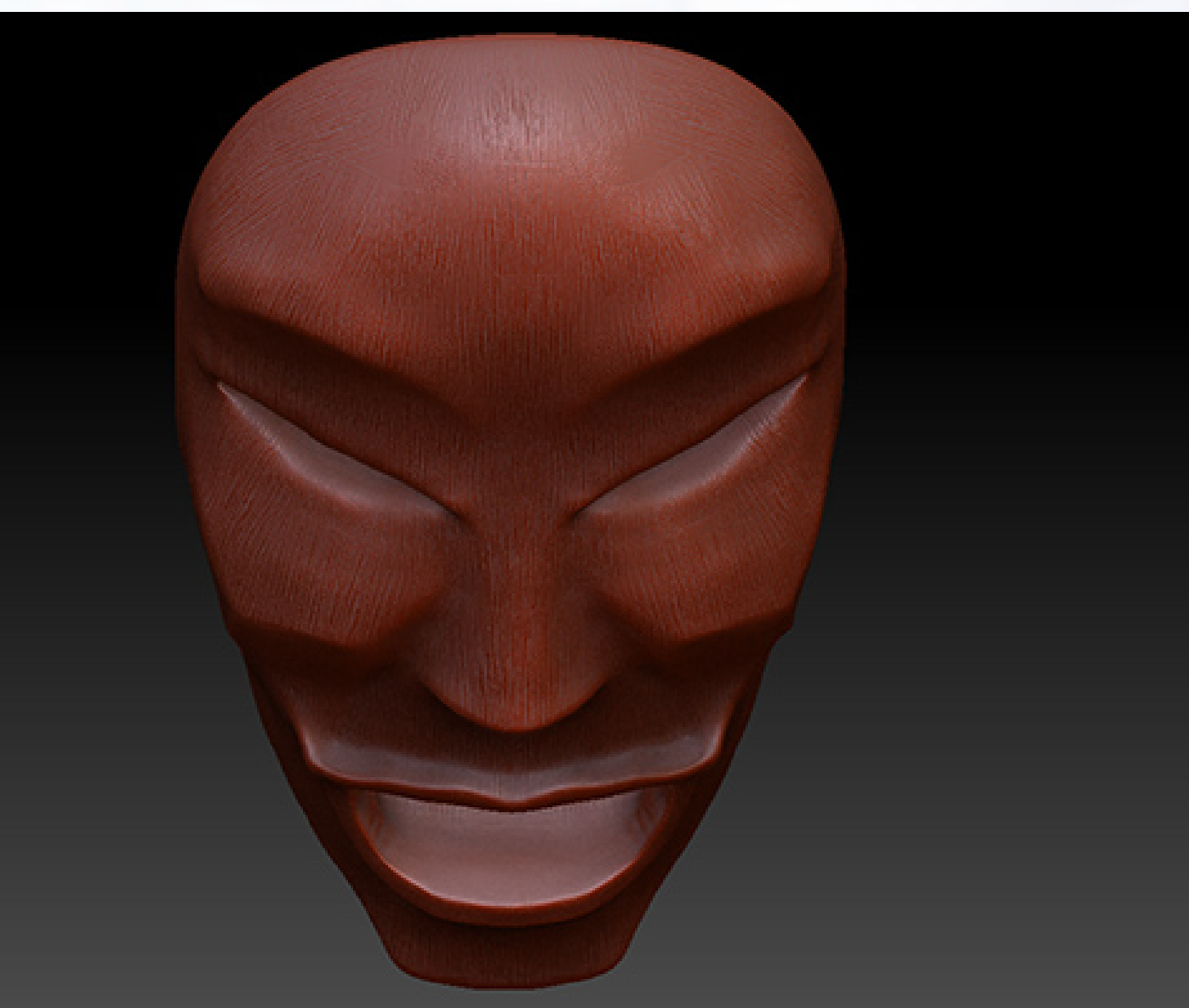
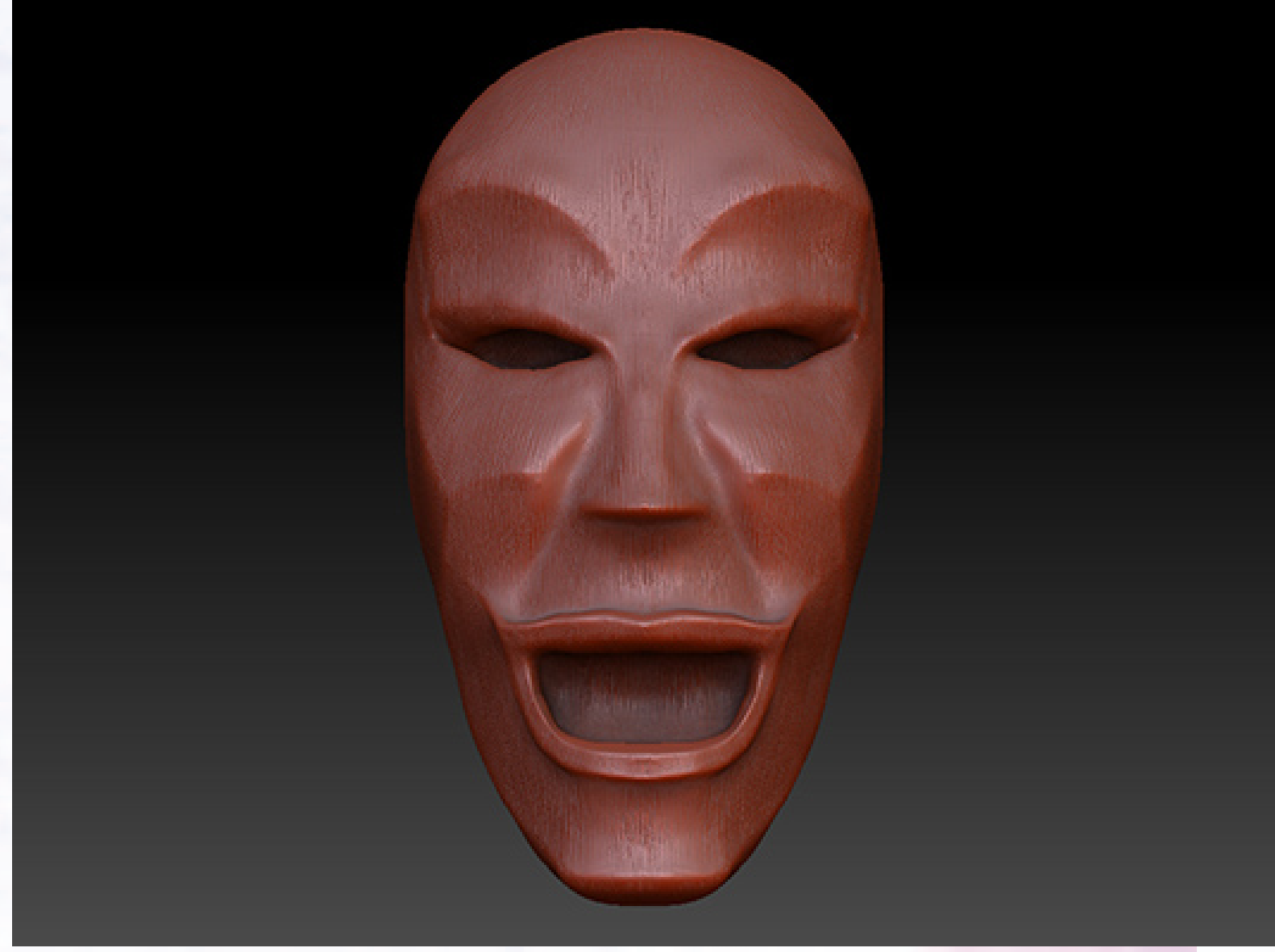
It's really tough to find this kind of in-depth production info, just like it's really difficult to find video or screen capture vids of an animator actually animating a 3d shot for production. I've done my best to write about workflow here and I will be creating in-depth production videos as well. So the key is to run tests, do projections, break the large tasks into smaller more manageable ones, create quotas, constantly re-evaluate, constantly audit whilst never getting lost in the process, always making sure you know where you are and then grinding and grinding every day, like a professional, until it's done. Once you figure out the problem solving part, it's a very simple process. Creating the film might be complex, but it is simple to understand in terms of workflow: If I do X task for Y days it will be done on Z date. One thing I didn't mention was the hardware and software problems that will probably happen at some point. The key with hardware is to make sure your system is solid by installing as little as possible. Keep your install as simple as possible and ONLY install the applications you will use for

production. During production the only things I had installed were Cinema 4d, After Effects, Photoshop, Bridge and Allway Sync. Once your hardware setup is working well, LEAVE IT ALONE! Don't upgrade anything in the middle of production, UNLESS it's something that will lead to a HUGE performance gain. If you're a hardware geek, you have this thing where you want to constantly upgrade and tweak your machine, but by doing so you're asking for tons of problems. I've realized that these extreme PC tweekers don't really do much work on their PCs, they just run benchmarks, play games and play on the internet. You've got serious work to do so don't fuck with your PC! Since OpenGL is affected a lot by single core cpu speed, overclocking can potentially add a fair amount of performance with little risk, if you know what you're doing and don't ask for too much. Cinema 4d uses OGL, so I ran my i7 920 at 3.4ghz. This added a nice viewport display performance kick and didn't hurt stability. However KNOW that hardware problems will come about, especially if you're running and managing a render farm. Have spare fans, SATA cables and the like on hand. I'm not going to write much about setting up a render farm because the technology moves so fast, but when putting one together, go for the biggest bang for the buck, whilst considering the power cost, as well as the heat/noise issue. I also believe in having more machines with less cores per box than one MEGA server box with hella cores. The law of diminishing returns hurts the "render farm in a box" performance and if that one box has problems or goes down you can't render. I think the perfect number of render boxes is four. I had four render boxes for HSM as well as WATS. On WATS I had four single core 3ghz boxes with 1gb ram. On HSM I had four Quad core 3.4ghz boxes with 8gb ram. I suspect that on my next film I'll have four eight or sixteen core boxes with 16-32gb of ram OR I might even use the same boxes I used on HSM. Your render farm can be as modest or as powerful as you need for your visual style. If the visual style/resolution/quality setting you choose on your film can be rendered with your single workstation, great! If it can keep up with your daily output of shots animated, that's perfect! So only scale it up in power, as you need it! If I had sixteen quad core boxes for HSM they would be doing nothing most of the time because those four boxes kept up with my output perfectly. An Uberector's fantasy would be to have a crowd renderer, something like the Seti thing where you wouldn't need a render farm at all, your audience could sim-

ply lend you their cpu power. Because of bandwidth limitations this isn't practical as of 2011.

So cpu power is definitely a concern. You may be able to animate 200 shots a month, but what if it takes 12 months to render it all? You have to find a good balance, so that you can render in a timely manner, with a level of quality you're happy with. I don't like the look of GI and I didn't use any on HSM. If I would have tried to use GI, my render farm wouldn't have been able to keep up. Things like scene ambient occlusion or SSS look great, but the render hit isn't worth it. No one is going to watch your film for the great AO or SSS, so focus on the story and characters, then move on! Remember that there are no render quality or even animation "standards", besides the ones you apply to your own work. In 3d circles people usually talk of "Pixar Quality" and it's a ridiculous notion. Audiences don't give a fuck about "Pixar Quality", only other 3d geeks do. If you make a great film with your own style people will love it. So if you're saying to yourself "I'll make a film when I can make it Pixar Quality!", you're never going to do it. It's just an excuse people use to not do their own thing OR it's used as insult to attempt to put down outsider films. If you listen to Ralph Bakshi speak, he talks about how the same thing went on with Disney back in the golden age of 2d animation. People would put things down if it wasn't "Disney Quality". Disney did great work and Pixar does great technical work. Their films aren't my cup of tea, but I can appreciate them on a technical level. I don't like the style myself, so to me "Pixar Quality" means safe, tame, status quo and that's not where I want to be. So find your inner punk rock spirit! Give the man the middle finger, go DIY and make your film by any means necessary!





CHAPTER 8

STRANGE+NOH+ANIME
=
StraNOHme



With WE ARE THE STRANGE I founded my style Str8nime. I did so because that was my style at the time. My work at that point was heavily influenced by strange animation like Svankmajer and the Brothers Quay, 8bit video game culture and of course anime. I have always been a fan of chiptune and since I was an animator I felt like had to do my part as a member of the culture. I hadn't seen a feature film with lots of chiptune music and 8bit graphics, so I had to throw it down with WATS, which I did. Now years later the whole chiptune thing has become mainstream so for me it's done. I'm still a fan of chiptune music and 8bit game culture but since it's being done by the mainstream now and I don't even play games anymore it's not a part of my style anymore. Granted mainstream films have ripped off Anime for awhile now but it's not a major part of my visual style like 8bit stuff was besides the DESU eyes I use sometimes.

So I looked at the art I had created for HSM. I looked at the things that influenced the film stylistically and conceptually and by far the biggest new influence is NOH. After studying Noh as an art, reading Zeami's treatises, it felt as if I had come home. I was always striving for the same things that Zeami did and visually the most striking thing about HSM is the MASKS. These Masks are my interpretation of traditional Noh Masks, so my new style is STRAN-OHME

I know there will be some people who will yearn for me to return to Str8nime. I mean the normal or "smart" thing to do would probably be to just use that same style forever like Tim Burton. He founded his style, what, like 25 years ago and never changed ever?! I mean he's hella rich and famous but, uhhh, the shit is tired and old if you ask me. I don't want my work to feel tired and old so I have to keep changing. Someone like Tim Burton is rich so if he feels shitty as an artist he can just go hang out in a mansion in France or something and forget about it. I have NOTHING but my art so if I feel shitty about it then that's it. I have no escape, nothing else to turn to and nowhere else to go. To be honest I don't want an escape. I want to be forced to stay on the edge because in the end my work will be better.

In nature only the strong survive. An organism must keep adapting and evolving or it will die. True art is in sync with nature so if you're a true artist you are like a force of nature. That natural force flows through you and its laws also apply to you in a non-controlled environment. Once you become stagnant you're DEAD. The controlled mass media way of old, with its promotion and distribu-

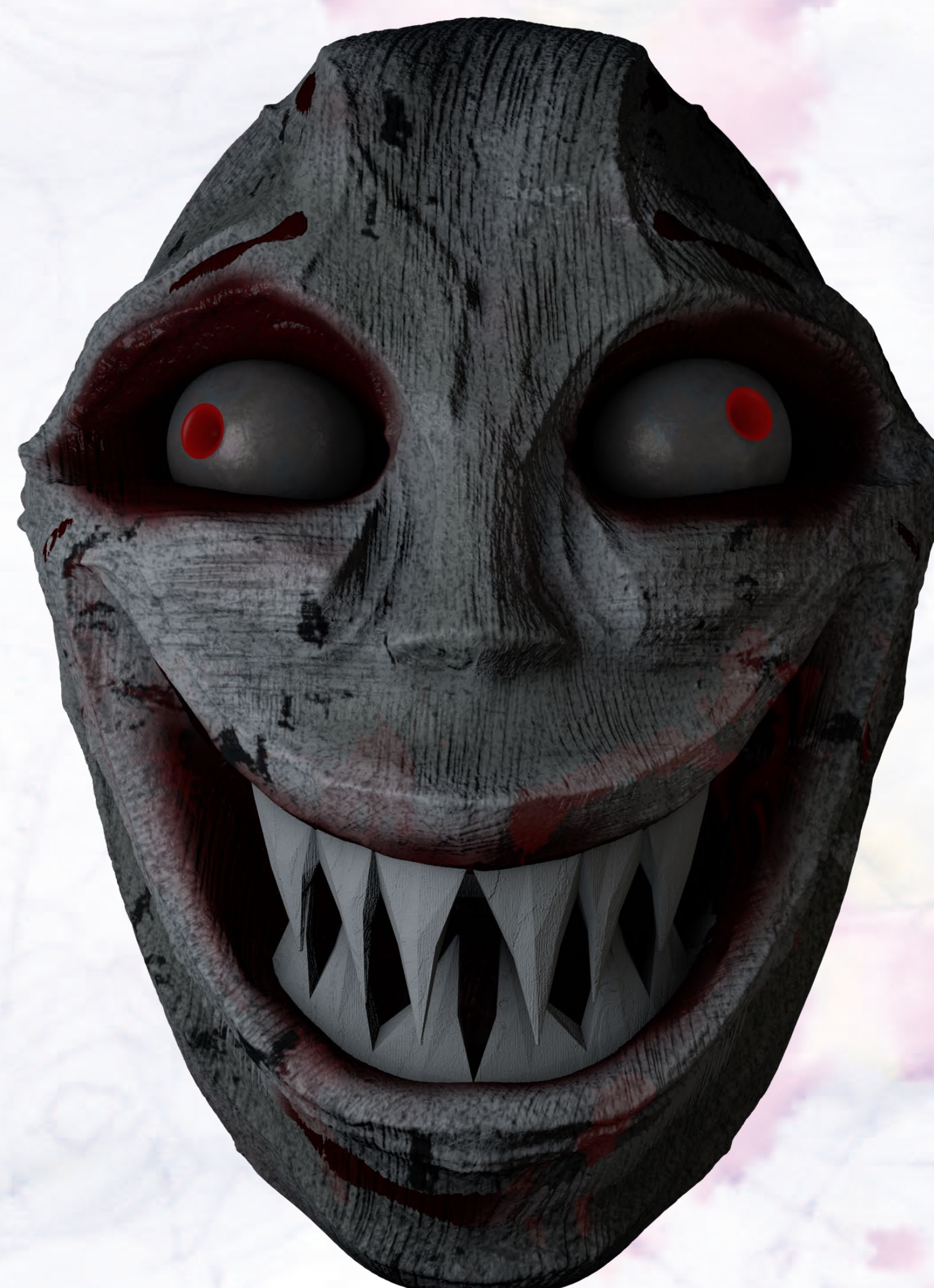
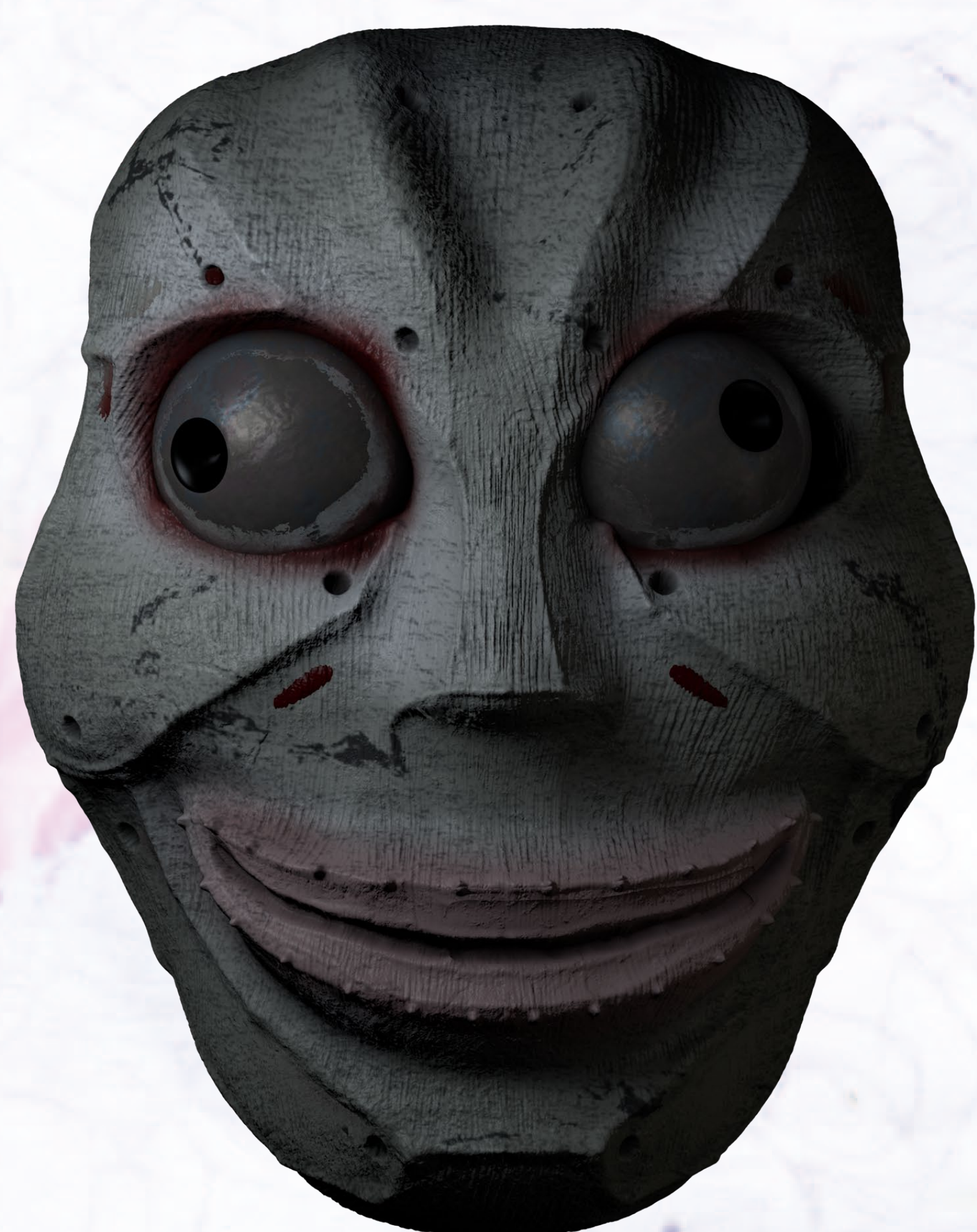
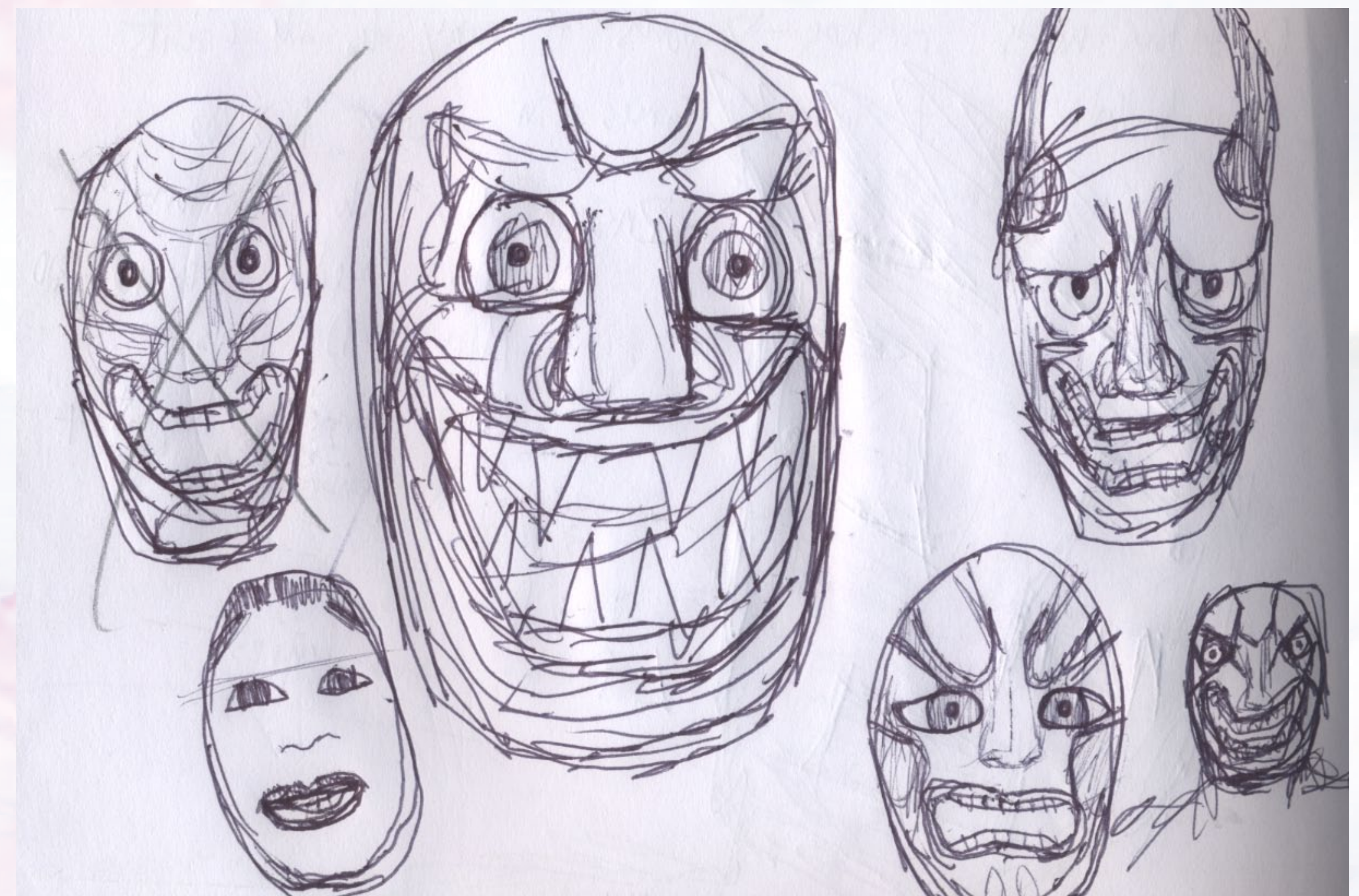
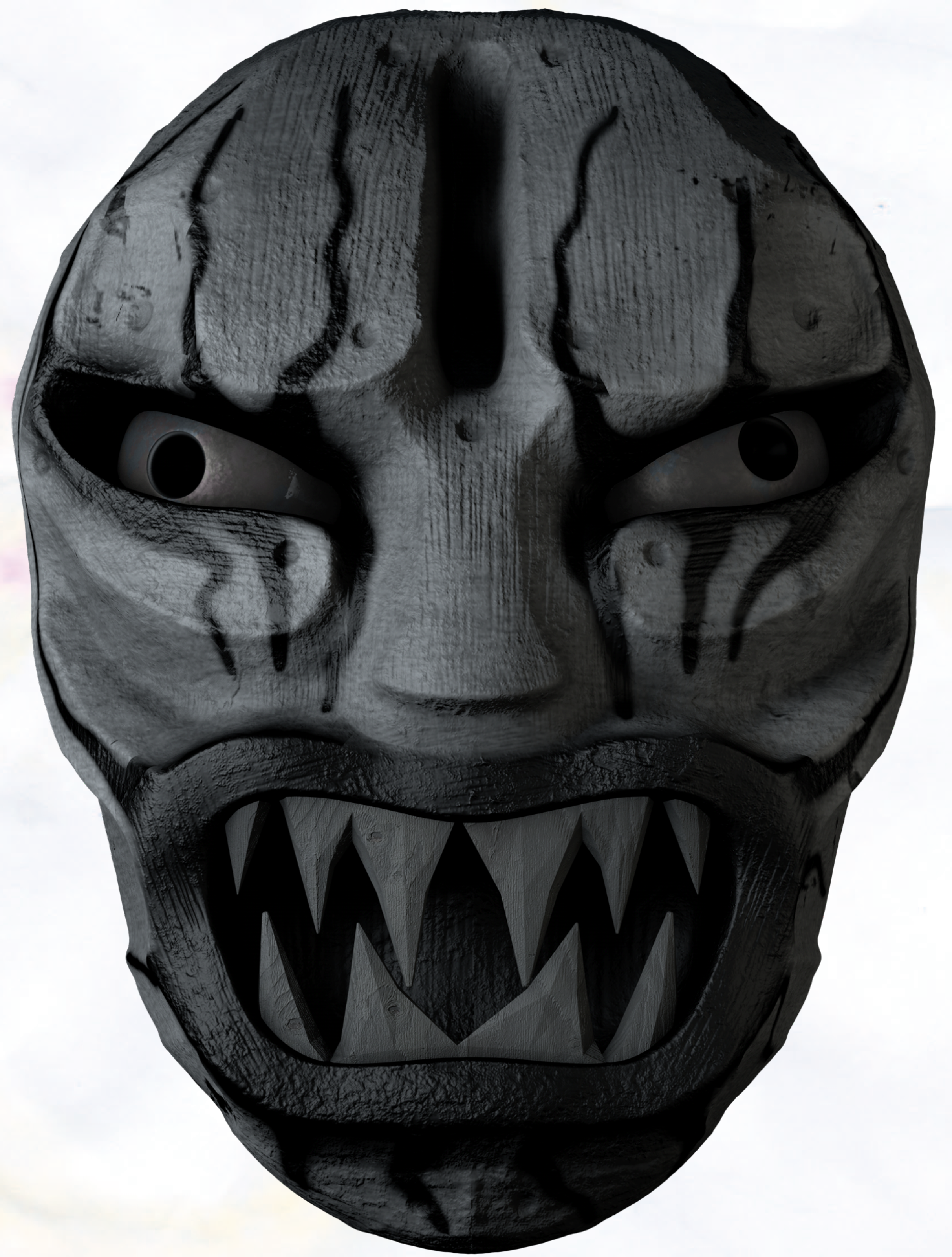
tion mechanism wherein it can buy protection, are going away. The INTERNET is an uncontrolled environment, as much as they try to control it. The internet wants NEW and MOAR, it wan't FRESH and FRESH-ER. Things get OLD so FAST, so in order to survive you're going to have to adapt constantly. People like Tim Burton are dinosaurs. They survive today only because they're relics of the past. They are protected by the old system but the old system is dead and eroding, so you must be able to survive in the wild and to survive, YES, you must adapt.

The internet liked my Str8nime style in 2007 but it is now 2011. If I can come out with HSM in Str8nime it would receive yawns because 8bit stuff is old news now. It's not new or fresh. I mean if it's in mainstream films then that means means its time has passed. So I came up with a new style because it was natural for me and I know it is required, if I am to stay relevant and survive. The internet loves surprises, so with every film I have to keep coming up with surprises. I mean three months after premiering WATS I was already sick of it. HSM hasn't even been released yet and I'm already over it. I want to get on with the next thing. Nature doesn't want for man or machines, it moves along. So when you stand still or fight the change, you



are cutting yourself off from that natural flow. If you're just in it to make money or whatever then I guess that's great because once you find a style that works, you can just do it forever if you manage to get into the old system and have them spend millions of dollars to convince people that you're somehow relevant.

I'm really excited about STRANOHME. I've always loved Masks and with this film, with this style, I was able to make my own Masks and showcase them. I also think my overall style has gotten a lot more refined. If you think about 8bit graphics there's limited resolution, limited color palette, they're pretty flat and simplistic. However if you look at the art for HSM it's totally different. Visually it's much richer and more refined. There's more variation in contrast and color, it's not as messy, it's an evolved style. And I will continue to evolve! I mean I look at some HSM shots now and I see the errors in them, errors I won't make next time. I'll keep pushing forever. People have asked me about finding their own style and that really comes down to your own obsessions. I was always obsessed with 8bit video games, strange stop motion animation and Anime. So the way I founded Str8nime was to look at the things or style I was obsessed with WHILE looking at what I thought were their shortcomings. Then I took those shortcomings, combined them and those combinations made my new style. So with 8bit stuff I thought it could be darker, with the strange stop motion animation I always thought it could be more epic with battle scenes and the like, with anime I thought it could be more abstract and artsier. So I combined those things to make Str8nime.

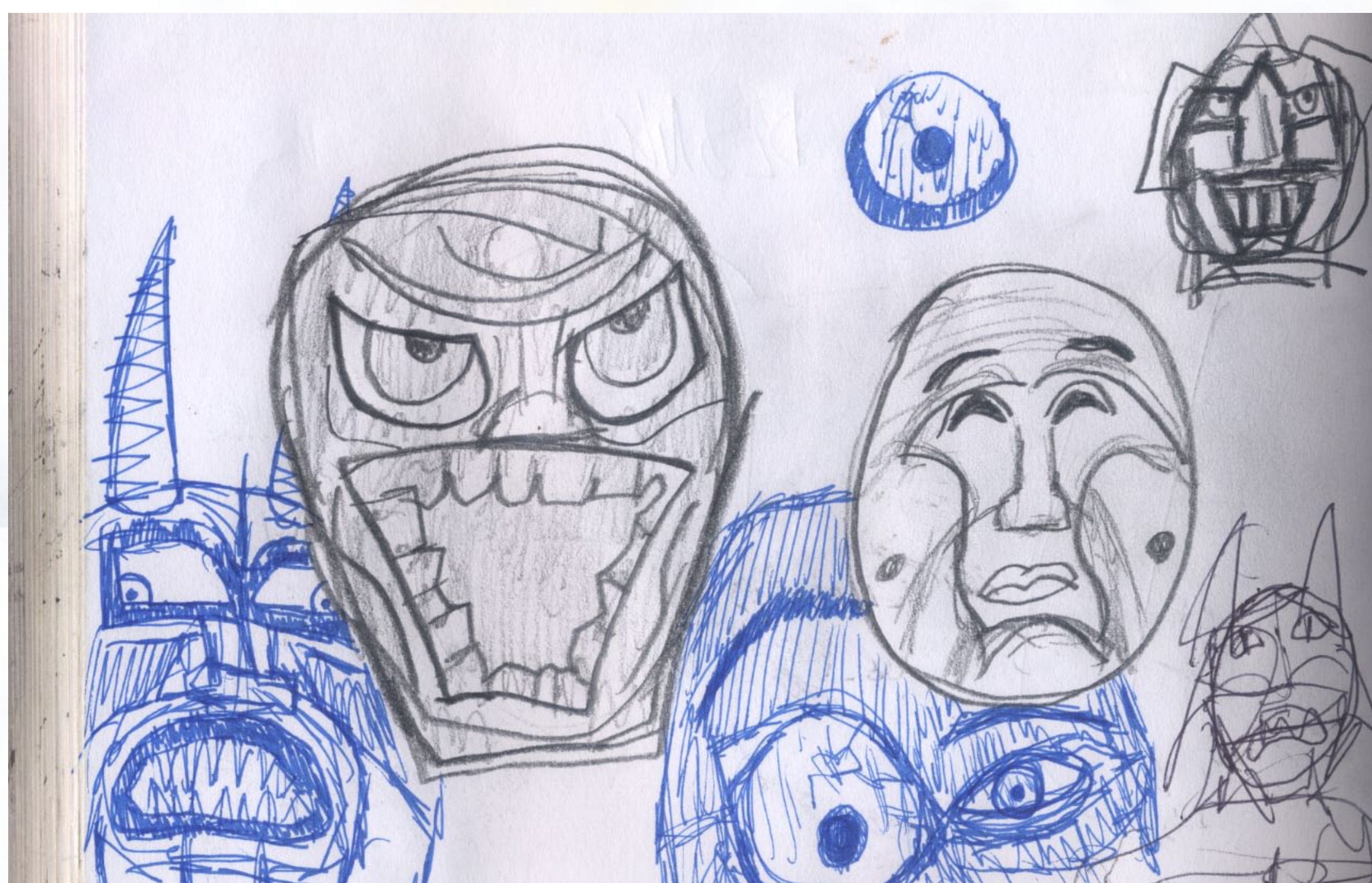


I did the same thing with StraNOHme. The only new thing I added was Noh and if you have seen Noh, you'd know it's pretty abstract. So although I love the concept of Noh and the principles of Noh, I wanted it to be used for horror. I wanted it to be repurposed for a narrative action film. So I based a lot of the film's theory and philosophy on Noh and used many Noh principles as defined by Zeami. I made my own Noh style Masks and added that to my usual strangeness and anime influence to make StraNOHme.

I wish every film would be made in some new style. I LOVE surprises and new things, I want to be surprised! To do this though, you have to be a bit of a showman and risk the wrath of the haters, who don't want anything new and will try to crush all new things, as that's what they do. If you're familiar with William Castle, the biggest showman in the history of cinema, you know that most of what he created were just gimmicks, but he was trying to do something new. Most of his ideas had less to do with the film itself and more about the presentation as well. As an artist you can be a showman by reinventing yourself, by walking the tightrope time and time again. Yeh a lot of people will want you to fall to your death, but if you don't you might even impress them and maybe they'll join your audience after you've proved yourself. It's almost like your first film doesn't count, or that's how I feel at least. It feels as if HSM is my first big film, as WATS was just like a test to myself to see if I COULD do it. To the audience as well. I think people have been let down so many times that they are hesitant to lend artists their trust, so they wait things out.



Evil Homer Simpson?!

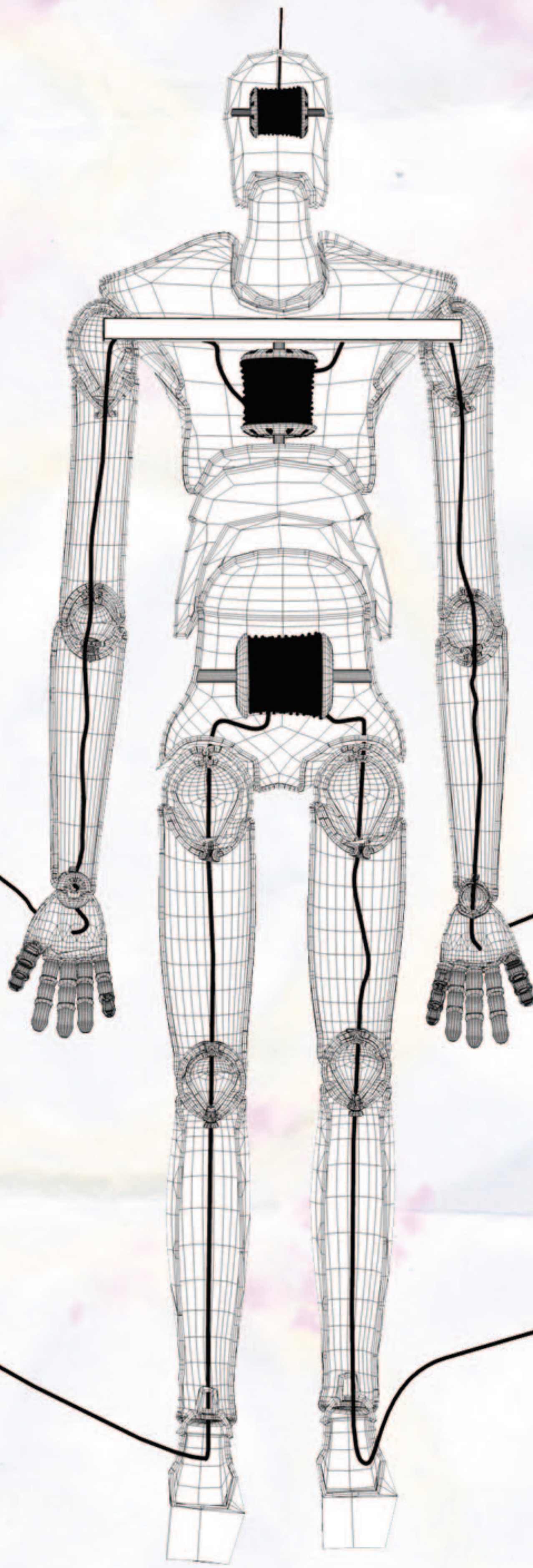


I did a bunch of mask concepts before sculpting in Zbrush



CHAPTER 9

M. arionette Theory



HSM doesn't just use normal 3d models or digital puppets, nor are they traditional marionettes. They are M.ARIONETTES, a new type of artistic life form that I have created. I drew them up on paper, then I modeled them piece by piece and finally I used them as a proxy, a container for my emotions. Every M.arionette in the film was created by my hands, every one of their joints was nudged by me in every frame for every shot. So the M.arionette is a lot like a daemon that I have called forth to act in my play. A M.arionette can only be used properly by its creator because it is an extension of said creator. It's an external, anthropomorphic manifestation of the creator's emotions and artistic will. When we look at Abstraction Layer theory, as applied to film, we can see the M.arionette's true purpose. If we go to the lowest level, the base, there is pure emotion which cannot be directly related to anyone outside of the creator without additional layers of abstraction. So the M.arionette is born and ventures down to that lowest level. The M.arionette is hollow when it's born so it travels to this lowest level so that it can gain life, so that it can be FILLED WITH EMOTION. That is when the MASK is applied. The emotion it is filled with will determine the MASK it is given, as the Mask makes its best match between the archetype and the emotion the M.arionette contains. That is how a M.arionette gets its Mask, however the creator must then guide the M.arionette up through the layers of abstraction through adding motion to its joints. By making words and sounds that emanate from the M.arionette. At this point the M.arionette comes to life and IS. Abstraction layer theory and film have close ties in the way I make films. In its pure form, the lowest level of abstraction for art or film is raw emotion, something completely abstract and intangible. If you would attempt to express this lowest level through your actors then they would scream, whimper, cry, laugh and crap on themselves. That would hardly make an epic Samurai film! The Uberector must get in touch with this emotion. Analyze it and recognize it. Once the emotion is recognized the Uberector can move up to the next level of abstraction in order to relate it to the largest audience possible. So let's say at the lowest level is a raw emotion, let's use love as an example, romantic love for vacuum cleaners. At the next level the Uberector will transmute that desire, or raw emotion, in a basic cause and effect story: Lonely man meets vacuum cleaner, falls in love, vacuum cleaner is stolen, man goes out for revenge, gets vacuum cleaner back and learns that vacuum cleaner was really a food processor but he still loves it. OK now we have raw emotion to fulfill the artistic requirement, then we have pushed it through another layer so that it has a cause and effect story to fulfill the requirements of a "film". After that's done we can push it through to a higher level and convert the cause and effect story in itself into a satire or commentary on, let's say, American life itself. We can even push it through to an even higher level and transmute it so that it represents a position

on human existence itself and so on. So you start with something BASE, something DENSE and you keep pushing it higher until it can be communicated on a higher level. Something complex and ethereal, taking egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly, so that it flies away up into the sky. Then you find another egg and do it again. You could stop at the caterpillar stage and I'm sure lots of people would be happy with that as most all films stop at that stage. Sure, the higher you strive to go, the greater your chance of falling and the chance of injury. But if you don't strive for something higher then you'll never get there, so don't aim low and be satisfied when you hit the target, I say. I mean if you're out for the money and fame, then sure, aim low. You'll hit all day and get rich and famous in no time, but know that it's a fleeting success and you will soon be forgotten. If you played your cards right you'd have money, but you'd also know that you are irrelevant and if you have any artistic bones left in your body, you will just be waiting for your double death. So this is why I created my M.arionettes. I needed a container for my soul, for my emotions, so that they could dance before you in an attempt to express the things that burn from the bottom of my heart. I know that most people won't see beyond the lower levels and I know that the highest levels are even invisible to me, because I'm just a Marionette myself after all. So I'm just enacting the will of my higher power, just like my M.arionettes are doing so for me. The way I see it this is how it works: everything is connected and is in a constant state of motion, change and progression. Study the ways of nature and you'll understand the ways of art. So I'm a M.arionete creating M.arionettes. We're all just repeaters. Our purpose is to take that energy, that essence that is flowing down through us and relay it. Repeat it whilst adding your own glint, your own spark to it. As long as the energy flows through you, you will always have that power. As long as you, in your heart, resonate with the energy: it may be to create, it may be to destroy, it may be love, it may be hate, it may be light and it may be dark. As long as we recognize it AS IT IS and not as we want it to be, we are fulfilling our purpose as a M.arionete. What is the purpose of a M.arionette? To dance. Be sure to dance.

CHAPTER 10

The UBERECTOR's Guild



Santa Monica 2002 as I was honing my future Uberector skills with red rubber shoes

UBERECTOR, what a funny word, eh? It was created out of necessity to separate what I do from what a normal “director” or “animator” does, so you’re probably wondering what an UBERECTOR is. In short an Uberector is a TRUE FILM_MAKER, a person that can create an entire 3d animated feature film on their own. There are tons of people who have made short 3d animated films alone, and many 2d ones as well. UBERECTORS make 3d animated feature films alone. They don’t do it totally alone, so I’ll define the specifics.

To qualify as an Uberector you must create a 3d animated feature film and complete all of these duties on your own: Writer, Director, Story Artist, Storyboard Artist, Production Design, Production Management, Director of Photography, Modeler, Texture Artist, Rigger, Animator, Visual FX Supervisor/Artist, Lighting Artist, Rendering Supervisor, Technical Director, Editor, Compositor
Which is pretty much EVERYTHING, except for Composer/Sound Editor/Mixer. On WATS I was also the Composer though. An Uberector is essentially a SINGLE person that can do the job of an entire film crew, which when compared to a 3d feature created by a studio, the Uberector is doing the jobs of 100-300 people.

To further make myself feel even more fancy, I should note that due to my background in music production I can also handle all of the audio duties on a film as well. I could do all the voice acting too! On most all of my short films I also did all of the audio duties. I chose to work with Endika on HSM because he specializes in Music/Sound. Uberectors aren’t stupid either. Endika is the most brilliant Musician I’ve ever met so I would be a fool to not want to work with him, but if he disappeared and moved to Chile I have the skills to complete the film on my own. BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY!

Go to imdb and look at the full credits list for a Pixar or Dreamworks film to see for yourself. I’m not trying to say that an Uberector can create a film with the same level of technical quality that a crew of 100 professionals can. That would be ludicrous. Since the Uberector is doing everything, he is going to have to make some concessions when it comes to the quality of the film.

Now as of this time in February 2011 there are only three

Uberectors in the entire world: Myself, Jeff Lew and Dave Krupicz. We all made films in different styles and we all made different concessions to get our first Uberected films done. I’ve finished HSM so I have two Uberected films in the can and as of this time Dave is working on his second Uberected film.

Uberectors create their films BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.

Uberectors are the FIRST TRUE FILM-MAKERS.

Uberectors are the only ones capable of making film A TRUE ART.

Uberectors are the FILMMAKERS OF THE FUTURE.

Uberectors need not a crew, they just need MORE COMPUTERS.

Uberectors should not be compared to film “directors”, as they cannot be compared. Film festivals, the academy or whoever puts on the major award deals need to include an UBERECTOR category for their awards. It is not fair to compare someone who merely directed and possibly wrote a film to an UBERECTOR who did 50x the amount of work on their film. Uberectors are in no way comparable to traditional film directors.

An Uberector can easily handle the jobs of a normal film director, but a normal film director would DIE if he/she had to assume all the roles an Uberector does. Take your favorite film director, stick them in front of a bunch of computers and tell them to give you an animated feature film two years later, with no help from anyone else and only a 10k to 50k budget. Do you think they’ll be able to do it? HELL MUTHAFUCKING NO! They would be HELPLESS! So where traditional filmmakers are DEPENDENT, Uberectors are INDEPENDENT.

Sometimes people e-mail me and say that I “inspired them to be a film director” or “animator” or something, however I will say that if you want to do what I do, you don’t want to be a MERE DIRECTOR. YOU WANT TO BE AN UBERECTOR!

Uberectors are TRUE INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS.

Uberectors DO IT ALL.

Uberectors don’t bitch and moan they WORK AND PWN.

Uberectors don’t fuck with Farmville they fuck with RENDER FARMS.

Uberectors animate when you SLEEP.

So if you want to be a part of the UBERECTOR movement, get cracking today! It’s also the most fun because you get to learn EVERYTHING and you’re NEVER BORED because there’s so

much to do. And when the film is done you GET ALL THE GLORY! No GUTS, no GLORY, so an Uberector has to have GUTS. If the film sucks the Uberector can blame no one but himself. Speaking of that I wonder who will be the first female Uberector?! MAYBE IT WIL BE YOU!

Uberectors know not excuses they just RTFM.

Uberectors LEARN it ALL, DO it ALL. EVERY TASK, NO MATTER HOW LARGE OR SMALL.

Uberectors don't work to live they LIVE TO WORK.

Uberectors have one big hobby its called MAKING FILMS.

Uberectors' dream girls have RENDER FARMS BUILT INTO THEM.

We are seeing the natural progression of the filmmaking process through the ease of use and availability of technology that makes filmmaking easier and more accessible to more and more people, even if they can only write in run on sentences! Uberectors don't GIVE A FUCK about RUN ON SENTENCES! While a director waits to be greenlit, an Uberector is already staring at the flickering lights of a hard drive as his test renders roll on.

An Uberector is a NO EXCUSE Artist, working in a field PLAGUED BY EXCUSES. If an Uberector fails, it's because his will is WEAK. WILLPOWER is the Uberector's currency. The more he has, the harder and faster he will work. I would never try to glamourize the role of the Uberector because there is not much glamour in it. Since the Uberector has no team of assistants to perform all the mind numbing tasks, he must do it all himself. So if a person has any sense on entitlement, any pompous attitudes wherein he thinks he is too "important" to do anything, he will fail. An Uberector is humble when it comes to his job. He will do WHATEVER it takes to make his film, from reseating heatsinks, to renaming and backing up files. There is no task too small for him to do because he knows if he doesn't do it's not going to get done. The Uberector is very practical. He doesn't believe in magical thinking. He knows the time and energy it takes to get things done, so he sits down and works everyday, inching ever closer to his goal. Uberectors work alone because they are just too damn hardcore for everyone else!

So if you want to be an Uberector, I say COME JOIN US! It will be the biggest creative challenge you've ever taken on. So if you want to test your mettle as an Artist, as a

Creator, it's the ULTIMATE TEST as you have to test yourself in all ways. Creative, technical, conceptual, practical. The Uberector is the ULTIMATE ARTIST AND ENTERTAINER.

Since I kinda know the other two Uberectors in the world, I asked them some questions and here are their answers.

Here is David T. Krupicz, Uberector of ARCHON DEFENDER and the forthcoming A CALL TO MINDS.

What drove you to create your feature film the way you did?

Short answer: Insanity.

Long answer: With Archon Defender, and to a lesser extent with Rocketmen vs Robots, it was more of like I held in my mind an already completed version of the film and all it took was to simply bring out the elements of the film onto the computer screen. Now, what you get on screen isn't always 100% what you envisioned in your mind, however with practice you can get closer to achieving that.

The important thing is to be able to hold onto the creative inspiration for the length of time that it will take you to realize it, and with any art, practice makes perfect.

There wasn't any point where I thought that something was unachievable, in fact it's the technical challenge of making the film which drives the learning process. For Archon, I was initially going to draw it in 2D animation. Unfortunately my drawing skills suck for 2D animation and it's actually harder than it looks to get it right, plus the shots that I was envisioning were going to take forever to draw in 2D and they still would have looked bad because I'm nowhere near as practiced at that as I am in 3D. So I made the decision to learn how to model and rig realistic human characters, something I'd been avoiding up until then, because I needed to figure it out to get the film done.

What would you consider to be the pros and cons of making a 3d feature alone?

The cons:

You are the Quality Control Department.

It's way too easy to miss something, or to get too closely attached to your work and miss some mistake that will carry through

the whole film. The biggest “complaint” I got in the YouTube comments for Archon was that the “arms were too short” (Archon Defender being the first animated film in history to feature stylized, misproportioned characters, you see...) The only reason for this is that the original character model I created had short arms and I based all the other models on that. I actually *DID* notice this when I had about 15 mins of film done and I didn’t really want to go back and re-do all that work, so I left it the way it is.

The pros:

You will completely own your entire film.

Especially if you can get a cast of voice actors to come record their parts for free, or for payment in beer or pizza. Other than that slight expense, you don’t have to answer to anyone as to what your film is going to be about, what it will look like, etc. It’ll be entirely your own creative vision, as well as you being able to convey it with the tools using the skills you have developed up to that point. I was recently talking about my newest film “A Call to Minds” with a distributor based here in Toronto. His first question to me was “Does it have to be that title?” I thought to myself “Hell Yeah, the title is kind of the whole origin of the film.” Once you allow outsiders to start throwing money at your film, they will start thinking that they have the same creative abilities as you do and will want to start dictating the direction of the film. If you’re going to let this happen, you might as well just crank out a “film school” demo reel and try to get hired at some studio. They might let you animate some blades of grass in the background, or rotoscope out render screw-ups for minimum wage.

Time:

It does take time. This is not a negative point, however. Your project will grow over time and you need time for ideas to percolate. Some of the best parts of my films come during production when I suddenly get an idea and think “Hey -- that would work great!” There’s a scene in my next film that grew in this way and it’s scripted to be about 7 minutes long in total. It solidifies a character’s motivation, as well as ties up his storyline later in the film. All this from a camera angle and fortuitous arrangement of “helper objects” that happened to look cool. Your time is something that you should be productive with. TV and the Inter-lols are a great waste of your time, so why not do something productive with yourself and maybe get something noteworthy that they can carve onto your grave-

stone besides “played mafia wars a lot on facebook”?

Do you see it becoming more popular in the future? Why or why not?

“Uberecting” is the future of Digima*. It’s already starting to catch momentum as the tools become free and available and the computing power necessary is cheaply available at second hand off-lease computer stores. The Blender Foundation has done a great job pushing the technical capabilities of that system and more importantly showing that you don’t need to throw a whole pile of money at a film to get it done. The future will be a combination of the ‘standard’ 3D animation process and machinima, as motion capture and performance systems tools get cheaper. It will be more of a process of performing your film, rather than tweaking a bunch of keyframes and waiting for renderings. It’ll be more like a stage production or the puppetry pioneered by Jim Henson and Frank Oz, except with actors which respond in realtime inside the 3D app. I think that the availability of tools and technology will do for Digima what the home recording studio did for electronic music 20 years ago.

*Digima is a term I came up with to differentiate my “films” from “Cinema”. Cinema is the old way of making films, Digima is Digital Cinema and uses the power of teh intarwebs and digital tools in filmmaking (or divx-making as it should more accurately be called). Animation is the most powerful of the visual Art forms, Digima is orders of magnitude greater than all previous methods for both enabling the creator to express their creative vision, as well as to reach their audience.

Any advice for someone wanting to become an Uberector?

The most common thing you’re going to hear is that it can’t be done. The more “expertise” someone in the “industry” has, the more vociferous they are going to be that you are foolhardy and doomed to failure. This is only

because they have, for the most part, abdicated their own creative vision and bought into a system that rewards mediocrity, while paying lip service to creativity. Film festivals and internet CG forums are good places to go if you want to hear all about how impossible or pointless it is to make your own film.

This is all a complete load of Bullshit.

The only things you need are a computer, the right software and time. Computers are cheap, the software is free (and legally free, ie: Blender), so once you have that all sorted, all you need is a good idea to turn into a script, as well as to practice building, animating and working in your software until you get to the point where the stuff coming out of the computer is close enough to what you had envisioned in your head in the first place.

To quote the wise Vulcan Jedi Master Yoda: “Do or do not, there is no try”. If you sit in front of your computer and TRY to make a feature film, you will fail. You have to sit down from the minute you type the first line of your story outline and BE making a feature film. The skills will come with practice and the stuff you do at first will completely suck when you look back on it a few years later, but the only way to actually improve your skills is to jump straight into production. If you’re just starting out at absolutely zero and you’ve just installed Blender and loaded it for the first time, make a couple music videos. Start out simple, then as you master chrome spheres over checkerboards (might just add that into my next film, now that I think of it...), you’ll start getting ideas that will congeal into an epic movie idea. That’s how I started with “Rocketmen vs Robots”. It began as a music video and quickly took on it’s own momentum.

So if you come out of the movie theaters, as you toss away yet another pair of 3D glasses, thinking “Hey, that wasn’t that good. It would have been better if X. I could do a better movie than that!” you may already be an Uberector and not yet know it.

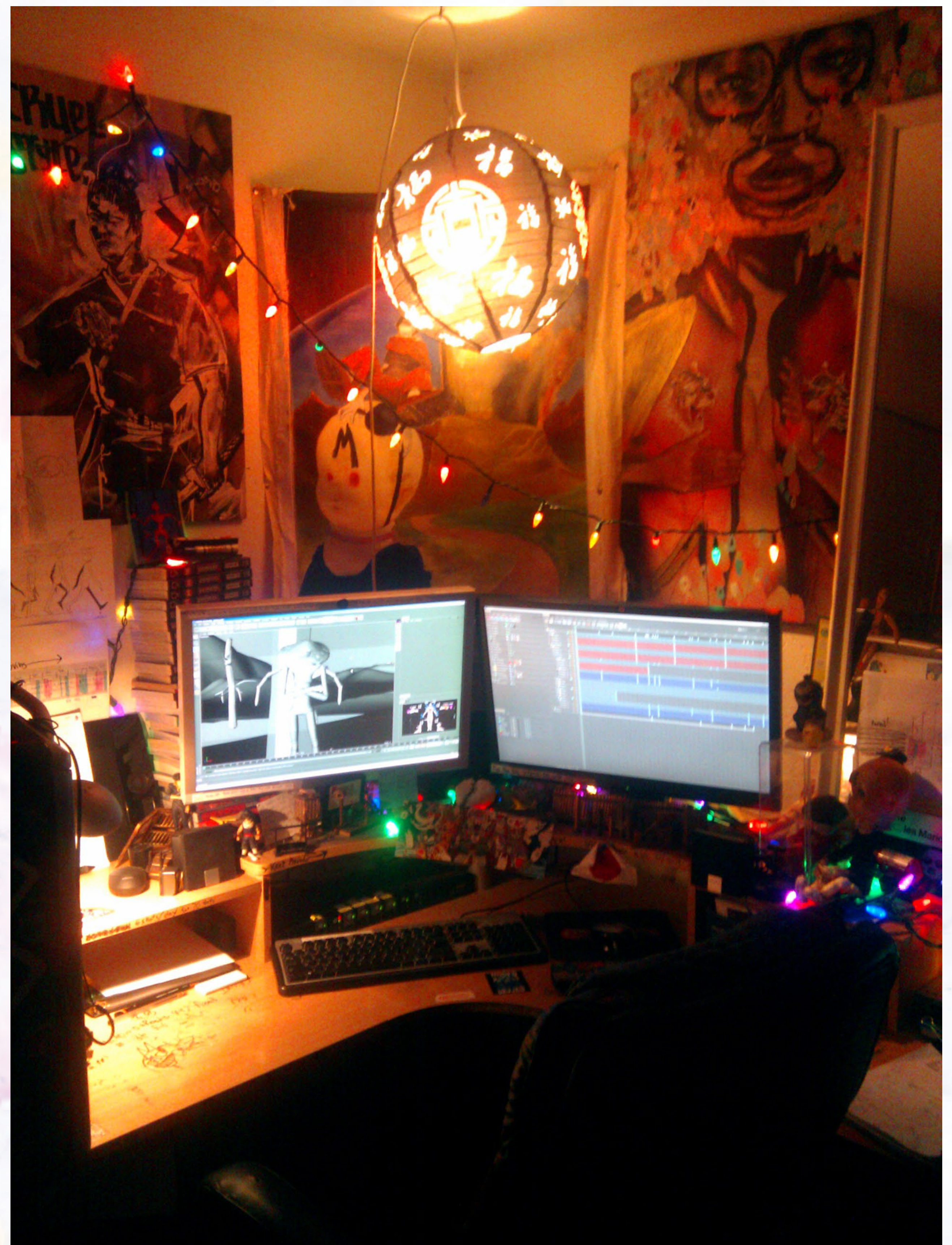
I also emailed these questions to Jeff Lew of Killer Bean

fame but I didn’t hear back from him in time to include them in this book.

Thanks to Dave for sending me his answers so I could include him in the book. Hopefully a few of you out there have changed your minds about “wanting to direct” If you REALLY want to make unique films AND make a name for yourself OUTSIDE of the studio system than you want to UBERECT!

I wonder how many new Uberector’s will be popping up in the coming years? Hopefully a lot! Maybe YOU will be one of them?

I look forward to seeing your films!



This is where the Uberector wants to be! At work in front of his computers!

CHAPTER 11

Heart String Marionette Research



Feeling right about home with the other monsters.

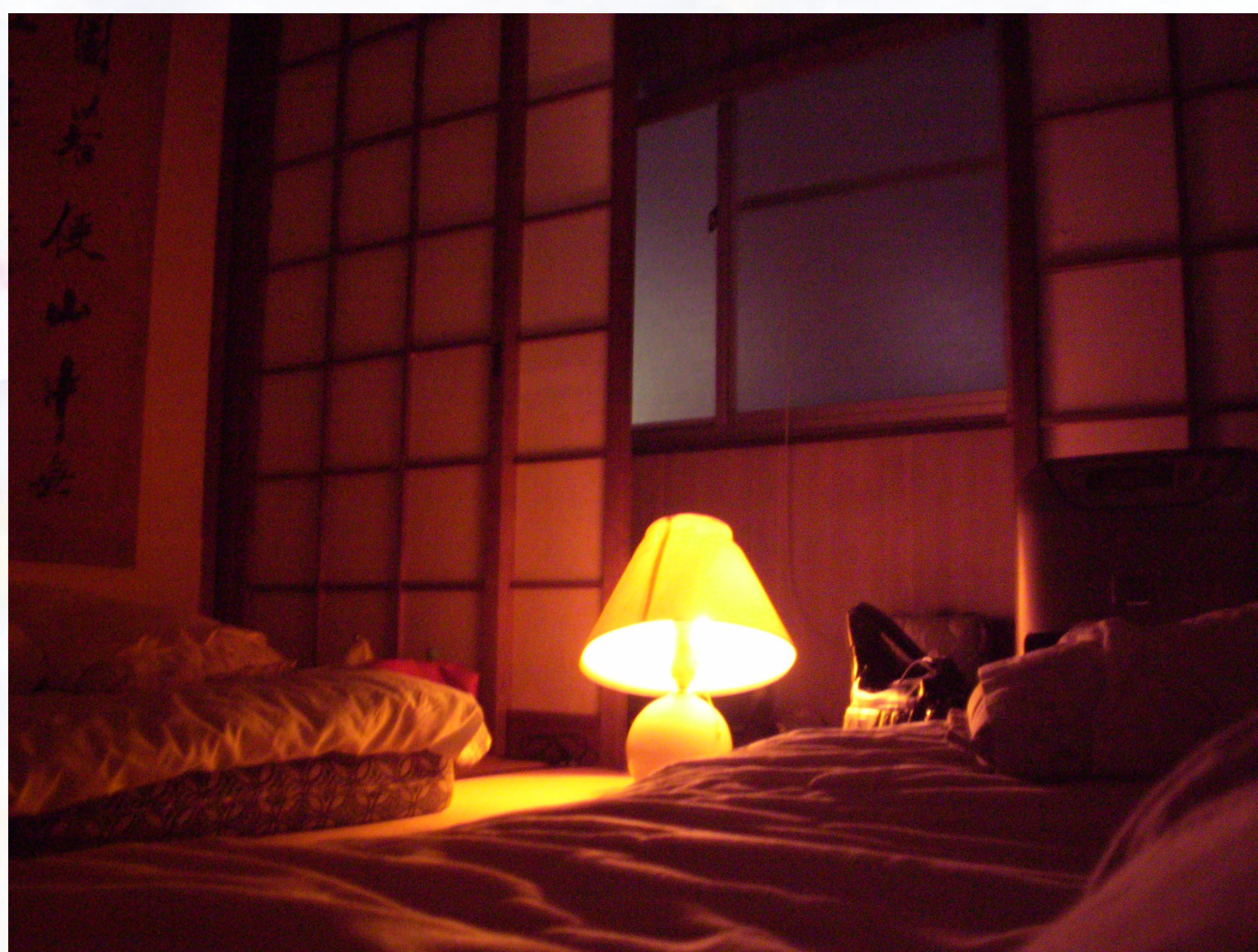
Since I set out to make a “Samurai” film, I thought I should go out to the places where many of my favorite films were made. I had been to Japan twice before, but I spent most all my time in and around Tokyo. So I wanted to take a trip to check out Kyoto and the old school looking places there. So in early 2008 I spent 2 weeks in Kyoto, where I got to check out a bunch of shrines, temples, castles, etc. I hiked through a mountainside covered in bamboo. I even got to visit an awesome Samurai theme park in Kyoto that houses the sets and backlots used for many Samurai films.



Today with Flickr and Google images you don’t need to physically travel to a place to get reference images, but there is something about visiting the places in person that is special. Anyone can make a film that LOOKS like a samurai film but I wasn’t really interested in that. I wanted to make a film that FEELS like a samurai film, that is why I did all the research I did and that’s why I wanted to physically visit certain places. After all the changes, HSM probably doesn’t look much like a Samurai film, but I think that it definitely feels like one. So perhaps the casual viewer that identifies samurai culture with katanas, decapitation and some notion of “honor” may not be able to feel the Samurai underbelly of HSM. I think I learned more from hiking around silent forests and walking on the creaking timbers of old temples than I learned from watching 100 samurai films.

The cool thing was that my lovely assistant and I stayed in a Ryokan when in Kyoto, so its like an old style Japanese house. We stayed there for about a week so I got a good feel of what it was like inside of one. To slide your feet across the floor and notice the way sound travels in those places, where you have to really whisper if you want a private con-

versation. I also got the authentic experience of eating Ramen and drinking Sake and beer everyday which was INVALU-
ABLE!



I had an experience that ended up influencing the visual style of the film when in Japan as well. We got lost looking for our Ryokan and so this nice girl came and helped us find it. I was very thankful and the only thing I had to offer as thanks was one of my WATS DVDs. She asked what I did and I told her I was an animator, then gave her one. So she was like “Oh we should hang out” and said she would come by or something. As several days passed and we didn’t hear from her I was sure WATS had terrified her, so I punished my assistant and made her drink sake till she fell down the stairs, as I was trying to get into tyrannical Lord of the Man-
or character.



Don’t drink and walk down Ryokan stairs!

A few days later Kayo came by and she said that she loves weird things, so she liked the film. It was raining so we borrowed some bikes and followed her around a quiet, drizzly Kyoto as she showed us around a few graveyards and shrines, then we went to a video store. Since she was in her 20's and didn't watch many old films and I was a Samurai film geek, I made a point of showing her all the great old films she had never seen. You can shame Japanese people easily, so I was like "YOU'VE NEVER SEEN NEMURI KYOSHIRO?! FOR SHAME!!!" How pompous am I, eh? One of the Nemuri Kyoshiro VHS covers was a black and white image that had been colorized and I LOVED the look of it. So secretly I took a bunch of photos of it. I was embarrassed cause I didn't want to seem like a TOTAL geek. That colorized image became my main point of reference for the look I wanted for the film and due to the re-lighting I did in the compositing phase I was able to get pretty close to it.



Nemuri Kyoshiro reppin the full moon cut in Kyoto

Kayo was also nice enough to have us over to her aunt's house for dinner. During the dinner I geeked out again as her two aunts who were in their 50's had probably grown up with those old Samurai films and they were like "WTF why is this gaijin talking about Tetsuro Tanba?!?" So I have more common interests in Cinema with Japanese people 20 years older than me than I do with anyone else.



Stencil in Warsaw courtesy of Jacek

In the fall of 2007 WATS was playing in Amsterdam, Warsaw and London, so I decided to travel around Europe for a bit to attend the screenings. My friend Aaron came with me and we met many of you on our way through Europe. It was big fun! The most inspiring place for me was Prague, as it's like THE place for marionettes. They have street performers with marionettes and tons of shows. Simply being there was very inspiring as well. Those old cities with the stone and wood and awesome statuary everywhere. I also think I found where Darth Vader came from! Just google "Golem of Prague" and look for images of that statue. When in Prague we went to a little concert inside of an old church and it was awesome. It was just an organist and an opera singer, but it was great. I can't really say how it influenced me other than strengthening my respect for real music being performed in a real place. I could see how such performance could create reverence for "god". That's how it was used, but I prefer to skip the god part and have reverence for ART!

As an artist I feel a responsibility to travel to different places and try to get an understanding of how people live in hopes that I will pick up on something that will help me communicate with those people through my art. Art is a universal language, so if used correctly I believe you can speak with anyone, anywhere.

When I go to a new place I usually just find a cafe or something like that and observe for a few days, try to soak up the culture, try to figure out and understand the rhythm of the people there. Once I feel I've got the tempo or a basic feel, I feel the need to move on to somewhere else. Maybe this is why many artists feel the need to move from place to place? New

tempos, new rhythms?

When I'm actually in production I just sit inside on a computer and don't feel the need to travel or anything, but in between films it's nice to go out and visit new places and soak up new experiences.

By the time I graduated from college I had saved like \$6000 from working in construction in the summers and by working at a furniture store on the weekends. Thankfully the tuition at my university was only like \$1200 per semester, so I was able to save up a little bit by the time I graduated. At that point I didn't have a car, whereas most people did or were in the process of buying them. I was saving up to get a new computer capable of editing my films on, so I said to myself "I'm going to buy a computer, because in the long run it's going to take me a lot further than any car can." So I bought the computer and walked, rode a bike or took the bus wherever I needed to go, whilst making films and honing my various skills on the computer. All my friends had cars at the time like most all normal people and, sure, they drove around town, they drove around the state, maybe even the country? But in the long run, through the initial decision, I've been able to travel all over the world and I didn't have to pay for most all of it. So I think in the end I made the right choice.

Here are some of the places I visited whilst researching HSM. Most of the trips were for WATS screenings or speaking engagements.

Sao Paolo, Brazil: Hello Claire and Beto! Things I learned: the reason why people don't obey stop signs at night is cause you'll get car jacked, there's just as many male prostitutes on the streets as there are female, there's tons of ethnic Japanese people there (we went to a Sushi place and there was a Japanese woman singing in Italian) and I don't get along with American "filmmakers" or "designers".

Berlin, Germany: Hey Mike Steve and Tank! Everyone is like an artist in Berlin, there's lots of Dog Poo on the sidewalk, the Berlin Talent campus is awesome. Don't get wasted, act like an idiot, thug it up and get rowdy at the Berlinale red carpet fancy party, then throw your laptop and puke all over yourself. Probably shouldn't do that anywhere.

Cologne, Germany: The cathedral is awesome. I love the sausage carts and the lemonade beer! German men will look at

your wiener when you're peeing, then yell at their gay lovers and cause a big scene.

Trier, Germany: It makes wandering the streets looking for a hostel way more epic when a chorus is practicing above a church and their voices echo through the streets. When all is lost go to Ramada.

Munich, Germany: Oktoberfest is kinda bizarre, as people don't just dance on the tables, they kinda like hang out, simply standing on them, as well. The food is great and the streets are filled with lots of big, aggro, drunk German d00ds, like German bros. Beer is great for breakfast too. Actually beer is always great in Germany! Do have your friend try to pick up on the transvestite that looks like Kelly from the "OMG SHOES" video in the train station.



Prague, Czech Republic: THIS is the place for marionettes and seeing dope lil concerts inside of churches with classical musicians. ALSO the Farmer's plate is the bomb and the beer is HUGE, good and cheap!



Me lookin pretentious on a train to somewhere

Vienna, Austria: There's weird cows all over the place and nowhere to sleep in the train station, except the photo booth.

Tokyo, Japan: Apparently there's some new cult and the members come up to you when you're eating cookies outside of Shinjuku station and they wave their hands at your cookies and change the flavor. Also don't get SO excited about



Must find Ramen shop....

buying a second bowl of Ramen that you tear your money in half, so that it doesn't work in the vending machine anymore. Do consider the rockabilly d00ds in Yoyogi park the coolest guys in all of Japan and when you go to Kamakura do feed sushi to the hawks.

Kyoto, Japan: Hello Kayo! This place is IT. Someday I'd like to live in Arashiyama, or maybe I'll just be a weird hobo and live in the bamboo forests in the hills. Oh yeh and when you go to said bamboo forest, to record the sound of the wind blowing through a bamboo forest, remember to bring the WIND SCREEN for your recorder or else all you'll get is "WSSSSSHHHHHHHH". Do go to the Samurai/Kamen Rider/Power Rangers theme park and hang out with your long lost pals.

Bratislava, Slovakia: Hello Philip and Radka! Apparently the water that the film school students drink tastes a lot like hard liquor. They drink with two hands: one for the hard liquor, one for the fruity chaser. Oh yeh don't be wasted and dance in some college disco for like 4 hours WITH you passport in your pocket. But you SHOULD grab the mic at some party and start freestyling if you're wasted and hanging out with some Slovakian hip hop d00d.



The West Side is SO proprietary!

Venice, Italy: Hello Paul! Do meet some mafia big boss and have him buy you free whiskey all night, as long as long as you sing "People are Strange" for him from The Doors. Do listen to his advice about traveling and money and when he buys all the roses from the lady selling them, then gives them to you, do run around all over Venice wasted, throwing roses at random people.

Rome, Italy: Do be disappointed when the lil Dario Argento museum is closed. Do go to the Vatican and take notes at all the weirdness.

Dubrovnik, Croatia: Do stay in the old town eating squid down by the pier and drinking beer, instead of visiting the town your family came from. Do feed the cats, especially the poor little one whose eyes were like infected and shut..

Reykjavik, Iceland: Hello my FAM over there and Stone! The ONLY place in the whole world where anyone has recognized me like on the street! Do eat the shark stuff and be like WHAT, but whimper away from the TERRIFYING sheep head! Do enjoy the clean air and water and the extreme peace and quiet out away from the cities.

Edinburgh, Scotland: Hello Adam! Do not eat the deep fried Mars Bars! Do act like Vladko Persimmon most of the time and trick people into thinking that's who you really are.

Limerick, Ireland: Hello to that grade school class I did animation with that day and hello to Sara and Shane too! Do not answer your hotel phone for a few hours to make the

festival organizers worried that you've been stabbed, only for them to think twice about it and say "but he seems very street so maybe he's ok".

London, England: Hello Liz, Tishna, Nikolai, Tim, Tony, Chris, Alexi and Adam! Do include slides of advice dog in your presentation. Do freak out when the fire alarm goes off in your room for no reason whilst running around with a snow jacket and no pants on. Do surf other computers connected to the hotel's wifi network and take documents from a film distributor, including all of the company's bank info, pin numbers, CC numbers, Gmail and Paypal passwords, etc.

Waterloo, Canada: Hello Joseph and friends! Do not have severe jetlag as to not remember much, except that someone asked you to freestyle at the Q & A and you did.

New York City, USA: Hello Brian and Janice! Do see NYC as one big ipod commercial. Do act really stupid at the boring film events because when the suits suck all the life out of things someone needs to put it back.

Austin, USA: Hello Ben! Do get the early scoop from Timo about Iron Sky. Do realize the highlight of the trip was when the d00d at the taco place went "d00d I'm going to deep fry this receipt", then he did and the other guy went "d00d eat it", which the guy did, then goes "It's pretty good bro!" Do be likinG the warm community vibe in Austin.

Paris, France: Hello René! Do feel like a dumb-ass when you can't figure out which faucet is for hot water. Do re-

ally appreciate that an artist who attended the speaking event shows you all over Paris and even has you come over to his house for dinner to meet his wife and kids. Do talk about MMA with the Brazilians staying in the same hotel. Do reminisce about the good old days of hip hop with the Moroccan cab driver and be shocked that he doesn't know who Badr Hari is, so encourage him to watch the K1 final a few days later. PANIC when you can't get internetS in your hotel so watch K1!?! Be DESPERATE enough to go to Starbucks to get online so you can watch it. Then when the streaming site blocks access from France scramble to find a working proxy, so you can go through US servers and finally watch the K1 and pump your fists like a weirdo after Hari KO's Overeem. Feel like a complete GEEK when you know that you're more interested in watching Kickboxing than you are about checking out Paris.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Hello Ben, Peter and Kira! Meet the person behind all the killings in Death Note. Unfortunately miss the MSI concert that was going on when you were there. Do not see the appeal of drugs and/or prostitution, other than the fact that it's kinda weird to have mannequin-like women standing in windows. Hmmm perhaps use that as an inspiration in the film. Do be disappointed when the "Smurf" ice cream does not taste like Smurfs.

Brussels, Belgium: Do give in to the chocolate hype and buy it for your family and friends back home. Do search for some kind of Van Damme museum without finding it?! Start your habitual Spaghetti Bolognese ordering whilst in Europe.

Warsaw, Poland: Hello Peter, Sylvia and Jacek! Know that Jacek's fixed gear bike is actually practical on the long streets of War-

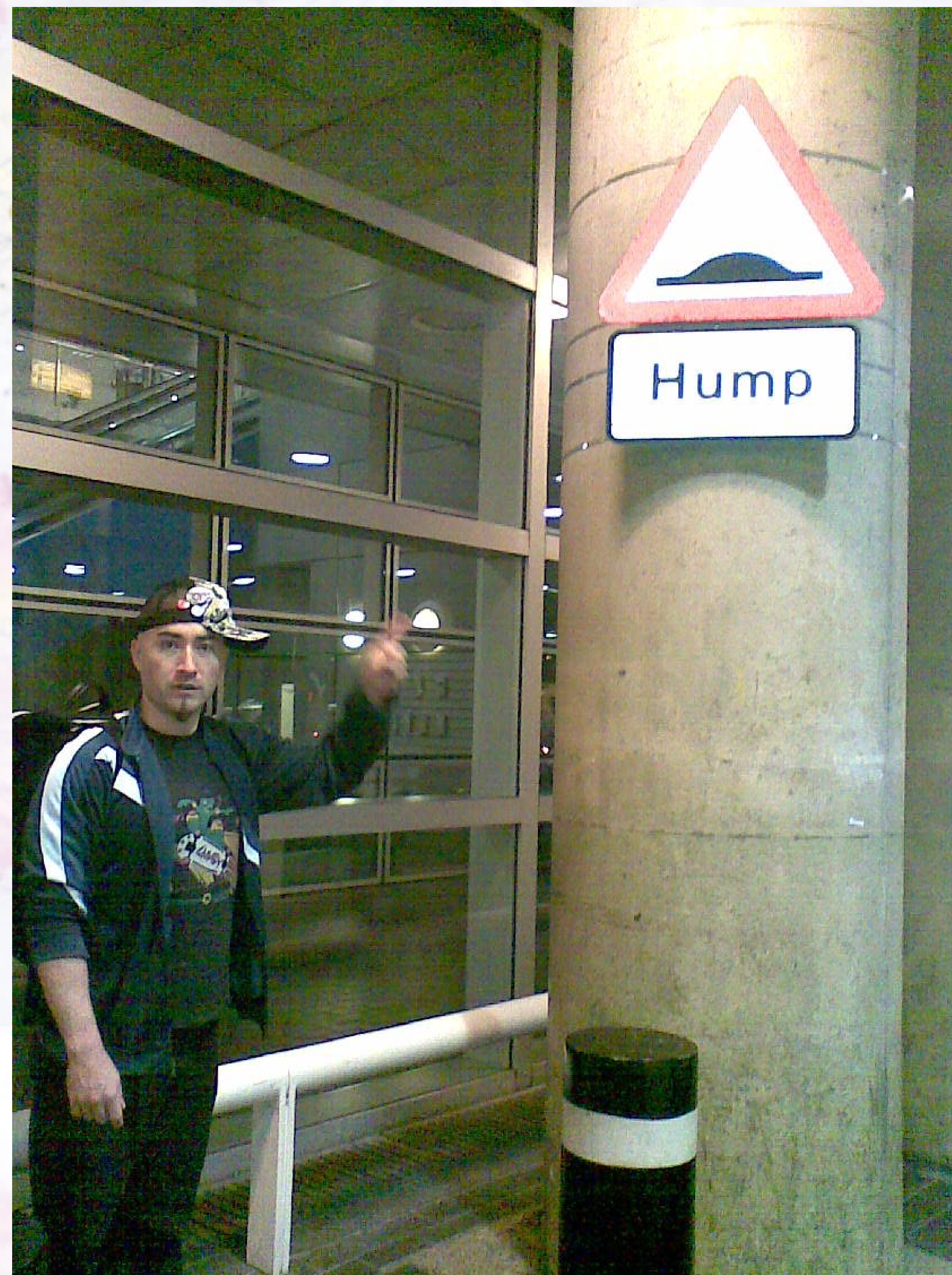


saw. Have a really great conversation with like-minded people in an antique tea house. Appreciate how earnest the people are in the Q & A and that Jacek threw down some dope stencils.

So I'm SUPER appreciative that I got to visit all these places. I hope I was able to take something away from each place that I somehow integrated into the film. I think just being there and observing gives you a lot of insight.. I don't speak any language other than English, but I've seen some similarities in the human condition wherever I've been. I look forward to seeing where HSM takes me and I still don't have a car!



Some day I'm going to be in Venice to REP my own masks!



Good thing I saw that AFTER my trip!



Me and Peter from Sweet Noise and Noise Inc... Hope to meet you again brother!

teh_END

Thanks to all of you who continue to support me! I know this book was pretty rough around the edges, next book I promise to do it up extra fancy! I hope this book caused your interest to peak in HEART STRING MARIONETTE. I only gave you a glimpse with this book as I didn't want to spoil the biggest surprises in the film. HSM is the culmination of 3+ years of my life so I really hope you enjoy it when you see it.

Thanks for reading A_BOOK! I hope it was useful to you in some way and I MEGA appreciate your support! I wrote nine more chapters that were supposed to be included in this book BUT it would have caused this book to be too expensive. So if you want to read the rest of the book get B_BOOK! B_BOOK is a much closer look into my creative and personal life. I describe how past experiences led me to become this M dot Strange guy and WHY I do what I do. Most of it is pretty RADICAL and EXTREME stuff if viewed by a normal person so if your a staunch supporter of the status quo I would not recommend B_BOOK. If you are ready and willing to make the best films and art you can today then B_BOOK is for you. I wanted it to be a sort of inspirational lil book you can pick up and read whenever you need some FIRE to get going and BREAK through the barriers life tries to put in front of you. So thanks again for buying my book and ALL THE BEST TO YOU!



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